

ARDEN MASSITER



WILLIAM BARRY

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BY

DR. WILLIAM BARRY

AUTHOR OF "THE NEW ANTIGONE," "THE TWO STANDARDS," ETC.

"Lo, the dim choir that haunts this palace high,
Chanting with one accord no music sweet,—
Ill-omened, rather,—since, to make them bold,
They quaff, the Sister-Furies, blood of man
Within these halls, and will not be sent forth;
But feasting here, a troop of revelers,
The doom of murder from of old they sing."
ÆSCHYLUS, Agamemnon



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CONTENTS

BOOK I

A DEAD MAN'S SHADOW

CHAP.	PAGE
I. TO LAURA WINWOOD, SPINSTER, AT MARINDEN GRANGE	1
II. CARDINAL AND UTOPIAN	13
III. THE VIEW FROM MONTORIO	24
IV. WHO LOSES PAYS	35
V. UDOLPHO	52
VI. SICILIANS DANCING	68
VII. REQUIEM ÆTERNAM	79
VIII. IN A GLASS DARKLY	96
IX. A HUNTING-PIECE	110

BOOK II

IN THE UNDER-WORLD

X. LORDS OF MISRULE	123
XI. TWO NOCTURNES IN ROME	139
XII. DIS MANIBUS	154
XIII. MY CONFESSION	165
XIV. TEMPEST	181
XV. MONTE MAJELLA	193

BOOK III

TIBERIO SFORZA

CHAP.	PAGE
XVI. THE LEGEND OF ROCCAFORTE . . .	207
XVII. I RETURN FROM THE SOUTH . . .	226
XVIII. THE GREEK THEATER AT TUSCULUM . .	242
XIX. MY LAST DAY IN UDOLPHO . . .	251
XX. I TAKE SANCTUARY . . .	265
XXI. SAN PIETRO AT MIDNIGHT . . .	278

BOOK IV

THE SUN GOES DOWN

XXII. INSURRECTION	297
XXIII. ASCANIO THE PAGE	315
XXIV. AMONG THE VINEYARDS	331
XXV. THE THEBAN BROTHERS	346
XXVI. COSTANZA	360
XXVII. ILLA SUPREMA DIES	371
XXVIII. MYRTLE, RUE, AND CYPRESS	383

BOOK I
A DEAD MAN'S SHADOW

ARDEN MASSITER

CHAPTER I

TO LAURA WINWOOD, SPINSTER, AT MARINDEN
GRANGE

DO you remember, Madonna Laura, how in the golden years a traveler from the orchard-groves of Worcestershire had been calling on your namesake, the dead, the famous, at Vacluse? And how, in colors stolen from Petrarch's sonnets, he painted for you the tender green wilderness and, as you told him by and by, strangely stirred your heart, until you could have envied the pale phantom which is haunting those rocks? I remember, at all events. It was early spring in Provence; with me, too, it was spring, and I rejoiced in my youth. Perhaps, on that day of wistful sunshine, I felt more deeply touched by the exquisite wild plants trailing down from the crags, and the anemones sprinkling with light a mossy meadow steeped in dews, than by all Messer Francesco's embroideries. Yet his verses rang within me, "like fairy bells on the robe of silence"; and where would Vacluse be for any of us had Petrarch never written? Over all the hun-

dreds of miles as I came through France, that magic fountain, and Laura, and her poet-lover, drew me on. A second time I was there, not long ago, in the autumn. Many things had changed—you and I, and the golden years, which had fallen like withered leaves under my feet. But the music of the sonnets was immortal and rang within me still.

I am going to tell you of another journey and its consequences. You are aware that I was leaving England; but you never heard of the strange old place at which I write—Roccaforte, in the Monti Lepini, no great distance from Rome, as the train reckons it, but five hundred years away from Shakspeare's Cliff. Years? Aye, my dear cousin and pupil, years! Behold the *révolté*, Arden, clean escaped out of the nineteenth century. For which the gods be thanked.

Shall I sketch the scene, before I explain by what an odd course of accidents I have been led into the Castle of Udolpho? "Send us a photograph," says Miss Dalton, looking up from her knitting and her easy-chair. Not I. These things cannot be fixed down on a square of gelatin by the sun, which sees nothing as we see it. Always Petrarch must mix his feeling with the landscape or it has no charm. You want Roccaforte as a page of my life, *n'est-ce pas*? Well, to begin with, take this from me. In spite of all the prose, the guide-books, the tourists that have made Italy their hunting-ground, Anne Radcliffe would still find her ghostly castle in the folds of the Apennines. Judge for yourself after my tale.

I am in a vast, bare, gloomy chamber, the walls a succession of faded frescos, like tapestry which rains have washed out of half its color—their subject, Helen of Troy, or Paris and the golden apple, one of those confused, interminable histories that set you dreaming as soon as you clap eyes on them. Above, a ceiling in

distemper—the Burning of Ilium—a dusky red, through which temples loom large, and the wild figure of Cassandra is struggling with Ajax, son of Oileus, who blazes in silver armor like a star, the single radiant point among clouds and dull fires. When I was falling asleep last night, and the new moon looked in at my window, this young soldier glared down upon me, in uncanny white, and I could swear he threatened me. Remarkable how one gives in to fancy, acting one's own part, in a house like Roccaforte! Imagination is wound up here to its peculiar key, and I am more than three fourths of a superstitious heathen already.

I did not say it was a comfortable room. Blot out the word comfort when you write of the Monti Lepini. No curtains to the windows, no snug corners, no easy-chairs, no books—nothing but a huge, baronial edifice of a bed, standing in state upon a dais; a pair of inlaid marble tables, with candelabra in gilt wood for their adornment; and stiff-backed Florentine chairs. The floor is without a carpet; the oaken door, which exhibits a variety of patched colors and gilt moldings, has no lock, but closes with a hasp. And the cold Libeccio—for it is chill as an English east wind up here to-day—blows in from every side at once, as if the massive limestone walls and the stucco on their inner surface were Japanese oiled paper. I have to wrap myself in a cloak, though a wood-fire is burning on the immense hearth. Ser Angelo, the steward—a grave, dark man, reminding me of some Englishmen by his taciturn civility—has given me a scaldino, with dusty charcoal in it, to warm my paralyzed fingers; and I fancy myself a regular old witch as I bend over it. No, please, not a word about comfort. In the Middle Ages they never had any, and Roccaforte is still at the year 1370—the Pope away at Avignon, Rome a desolation, and the Signor Prince Orazio So-

relli master on his own mountain, though, I dare say, as poor in cash as a Highland chief when cattle-lifting was honorable and great men lived by the strong hand.

I look out from one of my windows—it opens to the floor and has a wrought-iron balcony hanging to its edges like a bird's nest. Below, at a fearful distance, is a ravine, watered by tumbling rivulets, choked with ilex and chestnut, the tops of which are shivering and complaining—a sea of green waves, over it now and then the sunshine glancing merrily. On my right, high fantastic hills, in their outline strangely irregular, with here and there a screen of stone-pines, desolate beyond imagination. It is a sullen sky that lies couchant on the heights. By going to the angle of the balcony and twisting my neck round, I catch glimpses of the open country—olive-groves, corn-fields in stubble, cane-brakes, and a white village or two on the distant hillsides. There are lovely hanging mists of rain, shot through in places by the floating and uncertain sun, but even where they touch the white houses I feel that the lines are distinct, not magically shaded as in our Northern landscapes. The mystery which takes us children of the cloud hides within this painted cavern of a fortress, or down among the tall trees in the ravine. Elsewhere, the shapes of things are palpable and their measure is their beauty. Think of Francia or Frà Bartolommeo, not of Turner, when you picture these Volscian Hills, even with a storm rising over them.

Pass to the other window—what can we see? A sheer wall of limestone; below it, a narrow ledge with a parapet built into its substance; and there is visible a corner of the wind-swept, rough-paved, hard-looking piazza, where it mounts toward the ugly church of San Romito, with its forlorn pediment and an expression in every stone of intense weariness. Why do Italians

care so little to make the outside of their churches attractive? San Romito is a pretentious barn; yet there are treasures within. I shall be shown them on the Festa. But I want a church to tell me that it is a shrine or a sanctuary. This tells me only the grim chronicle of its empty days and its village mostly asleep. Ah, there is the lightning! Storm coming up swiftly from the sea, across the Pontine Marshes, and along these gullies, which have begun to roar with its mighty voice—organ-pipes of a swelling and tumultuous music. Another flash—I had better close my windows.

I shut them with some difficulty, by turning long iron rods into badly fitting sockets. The rain dashes against them, falls down the gigantic chimney, makes the half-burnt logs crackle and hiss, strikes a million sparkling notes out of leaves and branches in the ravine below; and the lightning comes in sulphur gleams—that blinding, creamy yellow which the sunflower has caught. Thunder above and around; but Roccaforte lets it rumble its bellyful. I hear doors banging violently in the distance, and that is all. Not a soul will come up here. The Prince has ridden off to Cartena; he will get drenched to the skin, which for a man of near seventy should be dangerous. But what will he mind? Not a rush, if he is the piece of granite I take him to be. Don Gaetano has gone with him. And I shall certainly not be asked to sit in the Great Hall and amuse Donna Costanza; not though her aunt Anastagia should be there to act the duenna, chaperon, guardian, or whatever they call it in Central Italy. So now, my dear Laura, I may relate how I come to be the guest of these fierce antediluvians. The storm shall be my accompaniment.

When I think of it, the adventure is laughable—in my case of all men. I have got into a scrape, started

a vendetta, and am in a sort of hiding from the police, or the noble order of assassins—I hardly know which. They used to be much the same in the good old days—*mais nous avons changé tout cela*. The Roman officers, known as the *pubblica sicurezza*, every one declares, are steady men, innocent of bribes and complots. Such, certainly, are those fine-looking fellows, the *carabinieri*. True, on the other hand, that several thousand murders—I can't recall the exact figure—take place every year in the Peninsula. You have heard me talk, often enough, against capital punishment—the gallows, guillotine, electric killing-machinery, and all the other hideous weapons of the law. Well, the Italians are of my mind; they have abolished the hangman, but don't quite know what to do with the assassin. Moreover, as I said, they have not yet left the Middle Ages behind. That, indeed, is the singular charm of their country. Side by side you may look on the centuries here, struggling pell-mell in a confusion as picturesque as it is indescribable. Murder was once the trade of a gentleman; and even my tender-hearted Victor Hugo assures me that it is still frequently the outcome of the finest instincts. A pleasing thought, for I came as near committing murder three days ago as the most virtuous could wish.

It happened in this way—but I am going to tell you a long story, and I know Miss Dalton will be scandalized before I have done; so I had better begin at the beginning, in the hope of tuning her nerves up to the right pitch. You, Laura, did not guess, neither did your friend, so English and insular as you both are, what I had in view when I started on this Italian journey. You did, say you? Only in the vague, I assure you. My motive has, doubtless, not changed since Pater and I fell out. It never will change; it is supreme and irresistible as a monomania. "Yes," you

reply, "always Don Quixote and his windmills." Be it so. But in coming to Rome I wanted, at least, to get a blessing on my enchanted sword. How? You shall hear. . . .

For the last half-hour, instead of going on with my story, I have sat watching this beautiful storm. The castle is perched at such a height over the Campagna, into which a winding valley leads at some distance, that we are above the clouds, among which the lightning darts to and fro, a great tawny dragon, with eyes aflame. Never did I hear such loud thunder; at the end of October it is out of season. If I had faith in omens, it ought to make my flesh creep. However, *che sarà sarà*. What a translucent splendor Monte Sant' Angelo appears in the foreground, close to my window, when the lightnings take it and the rain-clouds glisten! The landscape is now one immense orchestra—woods, hills, castles, villages all playing in a symphony of majestic, heart-subduing sounds. The world is alive, resonant with innumerable voices, uttering its secret from the deeps and the heights. Why do we not live that life, and forget the Cities of the Plain where men struggle, cheat, deceive, lie, rob, and murder? But thirty-five miles away is Rome, the queen of infinite sorrows. There my tale must begin. . . .

I traveled from Perugia, on an evening almost as unsettled as this, the sky a golden leaf, beat out into colors, all various, but tinged with orange or yellow; and by way of Foligno and Narni I came at length down upon the Campagna, stars resting over Monte Rotondo, and the lines of the aqueducts dimly visible in a lonesome land. Somewhere, suddenly—it might have been an acted dream—the walls of Rome opened, lifting our train through, into a glare of demon-light; and rows and rows of carriages fled by; voices were heard calling; walls of crude white rose up to meet us;

I found myself in a modern railway-station, on a crowded platform, with facchini around me, and cabs at the doors. Was this Rome?

I hailed a vettura and we passed out. A little way on, the fountain in the piazza threw up ghastly floods of that demon-light; plane-trees, borrowed from the boulevards of Paris, lifted their bourgeois heads above coffee-tables and in front of noisy casinos; the Italians of Rome—not, as God is good to us, not Roman citizens—strolled, jested, laughed, listened to airs from “*Orphée aux Enfers*,” lounged and chattered in their thousands under hanging boughs. I said to myself, “Those were the Baths of Diocletian; there is Santa Maria degli Angeli, the consummate work of the Florentine; and these are the Barbarians.” My cab rolled forward over streets and streets, down the center of which electric lamps were ranged like tall sentinels, along the sides of which rose the deadly-white new palaces—banks, hotels, clubs, houses of finance in every shape; luxury here, the means of luxury there; an enormous gambling-hell lit up with its cold, hard smile—and where was the Rome that this had supplanted after twenty-six centuries? Behind, hidden away, shoveled out of sight, sleeping in the sculpture-galleries, imprisoned in the Vatican. I had come to look upon the two Romes and compare them. This new-made city of yesterday, with its lights flaring, I thought was a ring of naphtha lamps, inside which the magician must take his stand, if he would call up the ghosts of antiquity, and compel the truth from their dead, pale lips.

My cab rolled forward—away beyond the sham-Parisian thoroughfares, but not away from the steel track of the cars, with their glitter, jingle-jangle, and mad gallop; past the massive old Palazzo Venezia, all dark within; down the Corso Vittorio Emmanuele;

and on toward the Pantheon. I had chosen a modest little pension, kept in a side street by one of our comrades, Giovanni Finocchio, known to me in London years ago, and now come back to set up for himself; a pension which had no other guest at the moment. My cabman looked doubtful when I stopped at so mean a threshold; but I paid him rather handsomely—in ragged paper money—and in a few minutes Giovanni was showing me over his abode with a delighted smile. It was small, but clean and bright. “Clean as a new pin,” cried Giovanni, proud of his few English phrases. “Look, Signor Ardente, you could eat off the floor! I know you other English; you are like *il gatto di Cicerinella*, always washing yourselves. Did I live at Londra for nothing? Ah no, per Diana, not for nothing. You will be clean here! Ecco, Signor Ardente, your beautiful bedroom, fit for a prince.”

It was all I could desire, in fact. “And no one else here?” I asked.

Giovanni wagged his finger solemnly in denial.

“Not Tiberio?” I continued, smiling.

He shrank back a little and pulled himself together.

“Eh, non so”—dropping and spreading out his palms. “How should I know? Tiberio is his own master. I see him not these many days. I—I want not to have dealings with Tiberio.”

“But in London you were often with him, were n’t you?”

Vanni shrugged his eloquent shoulders, looked at me, I thought, warningly, and murmured under his breath, “Signor Ardente, Londra is not Rome. You are come to a city of spies, and brigands, and conspirators, and—what shall I say? It is so, I tell you. Ask me not of Tiberio. He turns my blood only to be near him. Let him go, in God’s name!”

“That I sha’n’t,” said I. “Vanni, you are afraid,

but I am not. It was Tiberio first made me think of coming on this expedition; I mean to hunt him up."

Vanni kept his eyes fixed on me. Very dark eyes they were, with passion in them, which the simple-looking brown face did not express, nor the slight, boyish form. He came close up at last, and still gazing earnestly into my face, whispered, as if the walls might hear what he was saying, "It is true; yes, it is true—I am afraid." And oh! my dear Laura, if you could have listened while he drew out, with shivering emphasis, that one word of words for an Italian, "Ho pau-ura!" It was like a child taking refuge in the long grotto of Posilippo from the Giant Cormoran.

"Well, well," said I, passing into the saloon, where supper had been laid for me, "don't be too much afraid. Let me know where I am likely to run up against Tiberio, and I will look for our comrade. He need n't pay you a visit."

"Not my comrade," insisted Vanni. "No, no, I never had anything to do with him except at Londra. But—you have been at Rome once?"

"Fifteen years ago, when I was a lad. Then I went all over Italy."

"Know you the Via dei Serpenti?"

I reflected a minute or two. "The dirty, narrow street that runs between the Via Nazionale and the Colosseum?" I inquired after a pause.

Vanni nodded repeatedly. "Ecco, you will find Tiberio there some evening, at the Trattoria Ranieri. They meet there."

"Who meet there? The Roman Socialists?"

But my little friend set his teeth and made an imploring gesture.

"Why will you ask, Signor? *They* meet; is it not enough? Were I Vossignoria, I would not go within a thousand miles of Tiberio. He is the devil incarnate."

"Anyhow," said I, unfolding my napkin and addressing myself to the plate of minestra which Giovanni had brought, with a flask of wholesome red wine from the Castelli Romani, "you need not be alarmed. I shall not trouble the Via dei Serpenti to-morrow. I have letters to Cardinal Ligario which I must deliver."

"Ah, a cardinal is much better," exclaimed my host, with sparkling eyes. "His Eminence, Ligario, is a good man—good to the poor, good to himself, good to everybody. A fine man also, Signor Ardente, taller than you who are so tall. Not beautiful—brutto rather, and strong as an ox—but full of charity. I can show you his palazzo in the morning. You should be there at nine. He sees many and goes often to the Vatican. How do I know? I know because his cameriere, Masillo, is my countryman. We were both born at Avellino—he near the prison, on the top of the hill, I just outside the gate. We were boys at school together."

"I will see the Cardinal first and Tiberio later," was my conclusion, on rising from my hasty meal and turning into my pleasant white bedroom. The slow journey had fatigued me; the spectacle of this new Rome left a strange feeling of disenchantment. Vanni lingered at the door.

"It is a pity you don't believe in the Madonna," he said, with his half-terrified, childish air.

"Why, supposing I did, Giovanni, what would you recommend?"

"Ah, the Madonna would make his Eminence amiable to you, and she would keep you out of Tiberio's way. Don't I tell you, Signor, he is a demon from hell?"

"Yes, but you do not tell me what devilries he has perpetrated."

"If I spoke that to-day, I should be dead to-mor-

row. The silent man lives long; *chi tace non dice niente*. But if you do meet him," my little friend went on, with growing agitation, "notice the mark under his right ear. Perhaps you may discover some day what it signifies. Then—" pausing with an expression of the fiercest energy, "oh, then, you will not desire to meet Signor Tiberio any more."

With these words, pronounced as sharply as if a dagger had gleamed through them, I was left to my night's rest. I cannot say they made a profound impression on me. As usual, I dreamed a hundred dreams, but when morning broke I could not have recalled them; and it was with a light heart I set forth, under Giovanni's guidance, to present myself in the audience-chamber of Marcello, Cardinal Ligario.

CHAPTER II'

CARDINAL AND UTOPIAN

THE storm rages on. That, Miss Dalton, is my only stage-direction while I continue this ghostly narrative. For you are not to believe that the Roman sunshine under which, a brilliant, blazing dome, I walked to Cardinal Ligario's, will banish the specters, wraiths, and uncanny rout of hobgoblins, associated in other lands with night-scenes and darkness. There is a melancholy which broods over the Eternal City unbroken, intensified by the blue sky, and meeting you unexpectedly during your wanderings like a breath of malaria. I remember it from of old. I could have wished Giovanni away; but he would run by me and chatter all the time. We took a roundabout journey, through the quaint square of the Pantheon, where all is gaunt and aged, and the marbles seem to be stained black by the centuries; then out by Monte Citorio, and across the Piazza Colonna, where St. Paul looks down now from his column instead of the faultless Emperor Marcus; and so onward, until we were climbing toward St. Mary Major's. On those slopes the Cardinal abode, in a palace not his own, of which he had taken the primo piano since he settled down in the Curia.

But, my gentle Puritan—for I still address you and not Laura—dismiss, I pray, all that your novels and romances have described to you as the pomp and state

of a Roman cardinal. The palazzo, I grant you, was ancient, with an interior court of which the colonnade had been filled up, a fountain in the middle, its music scarcely troubling the air, and a marble staircase in one corner, which went up to the fifth story, or as many as there might be. Yes, so far the picture is correct. But where are the throng of carriages, the lackeys in livery, the rustling of silks on stairs and corridors, the audience crammed with poets, painters, churchmen high and low, and the universal gala? Gone, quite gone. The wide, gray steps were vacant; not so much as a one-horse legno stood at the door. Silence and solitude took their ease in the decaying courtyard. There was not even a flower among the crannies of the massive walls to soften their austerity. The Palazzo Annibaldi lay along in the dust of its thousand shadows, forbidding as a solid block of lava which had once been fire and was now its own monument. What sunshine could pierce that gloom?

Such is Rome everywhere, a portentous reality between dead and alive. Would the Prince of the Church resemble his dark dwelling, and seem but the shadow of greatness? We mounted the low steps inside; Giovanni pulled a bell at the lofty doors in front of us, over which hung a faded escutcheon carved in oak; and a leaf was opened—not immediately, however—by one whom I should have taken for a brigand in plain clothes, so furtive were his glances under shaggiest eyebrows, had not my companion saluted him as Masillo. In a moment they were in each other's arms, talking most volubly in their Neapolitan dialect, and gesticulating with hands, eyes, and every muscle of the human countenance. Their pantomime was ridiculously expressive. I could make little of the words they spoke; but how could I fail to discover that Giovanni—who put me in mind of a handsome Pulcinella

exchanging defiances with a stage demon—was insisting on my seeing his Eminence without delay, for I brought a message of life and death? Now concerning my message I had vouchsafed to Signor Finocchio not one syllable. He lied, therefore, by instinct, or to keep his hand in. But was it lying? Shall we not say, rather, the raw material of poetry, or even one of those pretty arabesques which light up the plain surface of fact? At any rate, I was the gainer by this dramatic improvisation. Masillo—which is, being interpreted, Master Tom—admitted me, through a sort of vestibule, into the saloon, and at once conveyed my letter of introduction to the Cardinal. I had only time to observe that three or four ecclesiastics stood about in the apartment, and a young man in lay costume by the window, where an old priest was talking to him, when Masillo, coming back, led me through another tall door, and I was bowing low in the presence of his master.

The Cardinal was standing near a broad table, covered with documents and folios in white vellum; his chair in crimson velvet had been pushed back; and just over his head hung a magnificent "Descent from the Cross," in its gilt Renaissance frame. The room was plainly furnished; a door half-open showed the chapel beyond; there was a flood of light on every object; and I saw a figure which Michael Angelo would willingly have sculptured in eternal Carrara. So tall as almost to be gigantic; thews and sinews of iron which no churchman's trailing garments could disguise; shoulders upright and proud, "fit to bear the weight of mightiest monarchies"; and a profile irregular but powerful beneath a mass of coal-black hair. Not a gray thread was visible on the forehead of this man of sixty-three. He held out a muscular hand to me, and, in accordance with Roman usage, I kissed the amethyst ring which he wore on his fourth finger. Impossible not to be

aware that I had come into a mighty presence, overpowering by its sheer intimation of physical energy and organs ready to serve an unknown will. Draped in black from head to foot, the only touches of color were given by his scarlet sash and zucchetto, or skull-cap, the latter setting off his deeply flushed features as with a martyr's crown.

"Be seated, sir." The voice had a robustness in keeping with the figure. He leaned back in his curule chair now and grasped its gilded arms, looking for all the world like Titian's celebrated portrait of Julius II come to life again. But I would not be daunted, and while taking the seat to which he pointed me, I kept my eyes on his.

The Cardinal had spoken in English, with a strong nasal twang, which might have been American. I remembered that he had spent years in the New World, as Secretary to the Delegation at Washington, and in other high capacities.

"You understand Italian?" he continued, perusing once more my letter of introduction. "Mr. Lestrangle, our amiable guest of a year ago, says you are a Dante scholar. I congratulate you; Dante is the supreme poet '*chi sovra gli altri com' aquila vola*,' as he says of St. John. But reading is not conversation."

"I am quite sure I shall understand your Eminence's Italian. I have made acquaintance with it in a volume of addresses on the question of the age—the Social Question—reading which I took heart and have come to you."

He smiled, and beat the open letter with a paper-knife. "Trifles, things of nothing," said he, passing into his native language. "But you agree with them, yet you are not a Catholic."

"How many are, your Eminence, that call themselves so?"

We both smiled now, and the Cardinal sighed. "It

is too true. Nevertheless, I am astonished—who would not be?—when my friend, the editor of the 'London Clarion,' and now you, his representative, talk of an alliance with Holy Mother Church. What, in a word, do you ask of us?" leaning forward and looking gracious.

Now, Laura, move down the stage and listen. I struck my great stroke on the instant.

"Eminence!" I said, "we ask the Church to carry out the Sermon on the Mount."

He started from his seat, flushed a deeper crimson, and answered, "She does that already. The Religious Orders, with their vows of perfection—"

I broke in, "We are not talking of Orders. I mean the people—the millions—those heaps of putrefying life—Rome, Paris, Vienna—cities that are hells and a world of the damned. They cry aloud for redemption. You are the Church of the poor; you have a hundred thousand pulpits; your influence is everywhere. No government can break or silence you. What are you doing for these, the poor of Christ? Have they bread? Have they a change of raiment? Do they live in decent homes? What becomes of their girls when they cease to be children? Is the Gospel for the cloister alone? Not for the proletarian and the pauper? Eminence, we men of a new time ask you, the Church of the past, to join hands with us. Will you refuse?"

Had I stirred those deep waters? There was no telling. The Cardinal's eyes never blinked, yet I fancied an expression in them, slightly ironical, or even amused, which made me feel a good many years more juvenile than before I had burst out in this headlong fashion. The situation had its comic features. My lips quivered, and the stately old man broke into a smile—the merest ripple. "I see," he said gravely in his nasal English. "You are an enthusiast. I remember such in America."

"Your Eminence may learn of more in America," cried I, between my exasperation and my desire to alarm or persuade him. "Shall we do the work of the Catholic Church, while you, in your scarlet robes, look on? Think what will come of it! Is Capitalism the sum of the Beatitudes?"

"Bravo, giovane mio," said the Cardinal, with an encouraging gesture—irony again? "Your spirit is charming. But—yes, yes, we are the Church of the poor, and that not from yesterday. Is it we that have stolen their patrimony? Is not the Holy Father himself in prison? The Sacred College were princes, now they are beggars. The monasteries, with their altars, vestments, chalices—and what know I?—have been put up at auction, sold for as little as they would fetch, robbed from the people that Jews may hunt over their acres. Look," he went on, taking me fiercely by the arm and leading me to the window, "do you see that great building? It is the Ministry of War. Knock there, and if they let you in, you will find the labor of our people ground into taxes, heaped up in powder, ready to be blown away from the cannon's mouth. Turn again: the tall palace which intercepts heaven's light across the way was erected, at the public expense, but not with the public consent, for a famous statesman who loaded his pockets with gold. Who are the robbers? They are those self-styled liberators, to whom statues are set up in every town. Go to them if you seek the patrimony of the poor. But do not come and reproach us, victims ourselves, who eat our scanty bread with tears."

The deep waters had surged up in foam and tempest; my man was caught, notwithstanding his politic reticences. "Nay," said I, playing with him in turn, "I shall not go to the Ministry. Would they disgorge their prey if I did?"

“Macchè, disgorge!” he exclaimed, in his untranslatable Italian. “Where they have not plundered they have squandered; they are near the bottom of the sack now, the brigands!”

“Then will your Eminence bear with me while I tell my dream?”

“Sit down again,” said he, “but I must be leaving soon for the Vatican.”

I assured him the tale should be speedily told. And, as he leaned back with half-shut eyelids, through which an occasional gleam smote on me, I poured into his ears the Quixotic and Utopian experiences, the aspirations which still obstinately refused to breathe their last, of Arden Massiter. I told him of my Non-conformist ancestry, my bringing up at Oxford, my novitiate on the Stock Exchange, with its tragical ending: how I had flung that devil’s business to the winds, broken with my father, taken a trade in hand, then left it for teaching as my proper vocation, and gone over to the States with my friends in search of a real new world, among the fields of Tennessee. We did our utmost, I could truly avouch; were happy and successful at first, then found the society we had abandoned too strong for us. So we were thrown back into the world once more. And I—nor was I alone in my conviction—perceived now that no kingdom in the air, no floating soap-bubble, born one moment to break the next, could fulfil our designs. Where was the mistake? Why, it was plain enough when you saw it. We young idiots had gone out from history and reckoned without religion. That was all. Yet our thoughts were just; our ideals had the promise of the future—but among men and in populous places, not in the desert where we strove in vain to plant these immortal seeds. Where, then, did the ideal live in society? Where was history embodied? The great old Christian Church,

majestic and popular, inspired yet organized, rose at this turning-point into view. I waxed eloquent on art, worship, brotherhood, the aspects of a diviner life. And the Cardinal mused in his chair and spake no word.

At last he sat up. His eyes were like stars. When he opened his lips it was to utter a sentence in Latin, "‘*Erubescere Sidon, ait mare.*’ Do you know what that saying means, Mr. Massiter? You—I will not call you Socialists—but whatever your name, you teach us a lesson. Only, you are very little acquainted with Italy. Have you studied our people in the hundred cities? In the mountains, where I come from? In Calabria or Sicily?"

"No," I returned, "that is my second petition. I want, in the columns of this great London newspaper, to sketch Italian life as it now is—a plain, unvarnished picture. Make me known to the Catholic leaders. Revolution is smoldering everywhere; but in Italy, we think, the lava stream is beginning to pour over the lip of the volcano. If you will not close with our alliance, tell us at least what you are doing. The world does not know; and the moral influence of the Catholic Church is going to waste like water."

The Cardinal rang his bell. Masillo appeared.

"Is Don Gaetano still in the antechamber?" his master inquired.

"Eminenza, si."

"Beg him to do me the favor of entering"; and then to me, "Don Gaetano is your man. I am delighted that he has not gone away."

A firm step was heard on the tessellated floor. I stood up and waited until the young man who now came in, and whom I had seen at the window of the saloon previously, had knelt for the Cardinal's benediction.

When he was erect again, and we had exchanged salutations after a word from his Eminence, I thought my eyes had never looked on so goodly a person. I was willing that instant to clasp his hand. But he stood, a little pensive, his face turned from me so long as the Cardinal went on speaking, and I listened, my fancy engaged the while in conjecturing pleasant things about this Don Gaetano, whose attitude and expression reminded me of some half-forgotten picture.

Not so old as myself by three or four years, nor so tall by several inches, and, happily, not so thin, a figure admirable in its proportions, easy and supple when in movement, and a face the most beautiful in its clear olive I had ever seen. The lips were full and smilingly curved, a golden-brown mustache overshadowing them; the eyes most intense and soft; the hair in curls, close to the head, brown with streaks of gold, strangely resembling the hair of some Greek statue—perhaps the Ludovisi Bacchus. A morning-tunic of maroon cloth set in relief a form athletic and abounding in vigor. But I was absorbed in contrasting the perfect color of the features with Cardinal Ligario's storm-beaten countenance. In that—and in promising myself a new friend.

They both talked now, too fast for my following them. Don Gaetano had a manly, persuasive accent, quite free from the nasal tones which spoil the loveliest of European languages. I caught a phrase here and there; the Cardinal seemed to be rehearsing Lestranger's letter of introduction, which ran to some length, and was, I dare say, rather florid in praise of me—Lestranger has a large collection of swans, good fellow that he is. My young man threw in a word of approbation, then turned on me his winning smile.

"You do not love this new Rome?" he said, waving his hand toward the window.

"I detest what I have seen of it; still more, what I have heard."

"And you would like to be a friend of some of us old Romans? — Papalini, Codini, pieces of antiquity?"

If they were at all like Don Gaetano, thought I to myself, how they would put to shame our modern civilization! Angels moving about their tasks in Fleet Street could not lay bare its disenchantments more vividly, though their garments had been flame and their eyes the lightning.

"The Sorelli once had a palace in Rome; perhaps you have explored it," resumed Gaetano, "but it was sold to our cousins; we have none now."

"There is Camillo's," interposed the Cardinal, quietly.

His visitor curled an expressive lip. "Camillo belongs to New Rome; his palace is a barracks all of stucco. Eminence, I shall not propose to show this English Signor the Sorelli in a light so deplorable. We were always Guelfs. Camillo is a Ghibelline—worse," and he laughed scornfully, "Camillo is one of the buz-zurri."

I knew that "buzzurri" was a contemptuous name for the Piedmontese "carpet-baggers," who have settled on the Eternal City—a swarm of locusts. But it was for me to hold my peace.

"No," said Gaetano, holding out his hand and returning my clasp, "but will you do my father and me the honor of staying with us at Roccaforte?"

Would I go to the world's end with him? Is it not wonderful, Laura, that friendship at first sight should be possible, even in a time so deadly prosaic as ours? I stammered out "Yes," and the Cardinal approvingly said, "Now, mio caro, you will see the old Italian ways. The Prince, Don Gaetano's father, is Duke of Roccaforte; it is beyond Velletri, in the Volscian Hills. New Rome has not mounted up there yet, thanks be

to God and our Lady. I know the country well; for I was born at Solmona, and as a lad I wandered down more than once to the Monti Lepini, and went on pilgrimage to the Madonna delle Grazie. Before your time, Don Gaetano!"

"Well, then," said the young Prince, "is it understood? You will be our guest at the Rocca, Signor Inglese? How soon?"

My wings would have taken me there instantly—I mean my desires. But I was under a pledge to find Tiberio first and learn what I could from him of the subterranean movements in this volcanic soil. I mentioned that day week. Gaetano assented; he would write and announce our coming to the Duke. Meanwhile, with his fascinating manner, he invited me to drive round the Passegiata Margherita in the evening and dine at his club. I excused myself from the dinner; it was part of the heathen ritual I had cast away; besides, my correspondence claimed me. But I would willingly share in his drive. Alone with Don Gaetano, I should have little trouble in persuading him to give me his confidence. That arranged, I took my leave.

CHAPTER III

THE VIEW FROM MONTORIO

AT the appointed hour we met on the steps of the club, or *circolo*, of which Don Gaetano was a member, not far from the entrance to the Corso, where the Piazza del Popolo is adorned with those two toy-box churches, absurdly like one another, erected by Pius VI. The Prince was driving a spirited roan, yoked to an open carriage, as light and elegant as the classical biga, known to you from innumerable drawings, which stands under its own cupola in the halls of the Vatican. It was the fashionable hour when the Corso is thronged, one line of carriages ascending toward the Piazza Colonna, a parallel line descending until it emerges on the open space before the Flaminian Gate, and turns by the obelisk to the Pincian in time for the sunset. Our direction was upward along the whole route—for we were to drive to the Acqua Paola, which is across the river, and then down to the Passeggiata Margherita and home by St. Peter's. We could move only at a walking pace; but I did not regret having leisure to draw out my companion, while I examined this Roman world as it passed in solemn procession on both sides of us.

We talked, or rather I talked, shy and surly as you know me to be in my proper bearskin; but the Don was silent as a Spaniard, though his sweet expression

of countenance made up for it, and I feared our conversation would degenerate into a monologue. However, by degrees he thawed. The keen, bright air of October and a transparent sky brought out color in the long array of vehicles, where every type of male and female beauty or ugliness from the ends of the earth shone or lowered upon the spectator, and Parisian toilettes called up an unwelcome vision of the Bois de Boulogne. The Corso is not, and never can have been, a magnificent street. There are no buildings to arrest the eye, nothing to compare for an instant with the Via Balbi at Genoa, or twenty other show-thoroughfares which might be named. Rome has no striking succession of palaces, or lines of jeweled windows, or avenues that lead you on from point to point of loveliness; and the Corso, narrow, dusty, uniform in tint, monotonous in treatment, is a deep trench with a strip of intense blue overhead. I remarked as much to Don Gaetano.

"True," said he, absently, "but it was once the street of the Carnival."

"Was—not is?" I echoed.

"Yes," he went on, half to himself, "in other years these carriages might have been filled with a crowd of maskers; allegories would pass by in triumphal cars; the windows would have flaunted their gayest tapestries; in every balcony you would have seen groups of joyous or grotesque figures, amused and amusing, while the white showers of confetti filled the air and sprinkled their snow on the heads and the bright dominos of a population of revelers, and by and by the moccoli would sparkle everywhere. We Romans, my father assures me, could be children at play, and the city an opera-stage, in the bad old times. But now—" his features took on an expression of grave satire, "the forestieri flock to Rome at Carnival, and bring their moneyed melancholy with them. An Italian funeral is

gayer than this never-ending march of souls in pain. Look at them. Even their love-making is a dull flirtation."

I looked, as he bade me, and laughed. Many couples of innamorati were passing in every sort of modern conveyance that wealth could put its glitter upon; but the Carnival had taken flight, and one would as soon have expected the obelisk in the piazza behind us to begin dancing a Scottish jig as these languid persons to pelt each other with confetti and sugar-plums or break out into sonnets. Don Gaetano laughed as well, but his eyes flashed with a sinister light.

"You want the bad old times back again—King Carnival and the rest?" I said to him. "Should you be willing to revive it all? A scene, for instance, like the scarlet-hued panorama which Dumas gives in 'Monte Cristo' of a carnival-execution in Papal Rome?"

"Why not?" shrugging his shoulders and touching his steed's flanks sharply. "It was tragic and passionate. This—who could live long with this? It is the mud of the Tiber when the flood has retreated—mud, stained yellow! Pah, let us get away from it. Avanti!" And he whipped up the roan and almost entangled our wheels with a carriage that was coming down at a smart trot over the broader spaces of the Piazza Colonna, where we had now arrived. There was a slight confusion until the vehicles got loose again. The barouche, drawn by a pair of splendid grays, with which we had come into collision, held a single figure—a tall and remarkably pale-faced man, with dark whiskers and regular profile, who was reclining as if fatigued against the cushions behind him. He looked up, uttered an inarticulate exclamation, and saluted with his right hand, showing a thin smile over his white teeth, but the rest of his face immovable as a mask.

Don Gaetano lifted his hat silently. I saw no smile go with that brief recognition. The carriages passed on their several ways; and I ventured to ask, "Who is the serious-looking person? For him, at any rate, Carnival is over."

"That is my step-brother Camillo," said the Don, mastering some obscure emotion, "my elder brother. As you remark, a grave Signor, a politician and a New Roman. He married the daughter of the present Prime Minister, Scanza, five or six years ago; but they have no children."

Consequently, I thought, were Principe Camillo to die, the title of Roccaforte, and whatever estates went with it, would devolve on Gaetano. Did the explanation of their coldness lurk in those fears and hopes? "They have no children" must signify, sure enough, to the younger brother, "May they never have any!" Gaetano's beautiful face, clouded over with silent fury, was something to contemplate just then. Medusa looked out from it, and the promise of death. "You strange creature," I whispered in my heart as we tore on our way to the bridge through long and dismal alleys, "how you strike our conventions and formal virtues dead with one stroke! You would kill that brother, I see it in your swarthy paleness—kill, and not repent." I had stumbled, it would seem, into a Pagan under-world, where these two figures wrestled in a strangling combat.

The carriage raced along, tore across the Ponte Garibaldi, and ascended to the Janiculum at a hand gallop. When we had reached San Pietro in Montorio, the Prince dismounted, threw the reins to a shabbily dressed fellow—one of the many loitering at all corners and byways, and wherever there is an open space or a flight of steps, in this beggar-haunted capital—and invited me to gaze out over the parapet on Rome, under

an evening sky. "Do you remember it all?" he asked me with a tranquil air, as though the furious driving had done him good. "Cardinal Ligario gave me to understand that you lived here in your boyhood; and my own ear assures me that you speak our language as we Romans do." So handsome a compliment, though I secretly believed in its justice, threw me off my balance; I did not reply immediately, and when I did, memory had given my reflections a sadder cast.

"I spent nearly two years in Italy with my mother; she came in search of health, and died at Venice, when I was sixteen, but almost as many years have passed since then. No, I don't remember those frightful new quarters beyond the Colosseum, near St. John Lateran. We used to stand at this very spot, my mother and I; many an afternoon we drove up here, and we would make out one by one the great piles of ruin. The Palatine was less distinct in detail then, but still more suggestive of imperial strength and mystery with its ilex groves about it. Is not your Palazzo Sorelli down there, by the Tiber, of which we cannot get a glimpse from this point?"

"It is there," he muttered, stretching his right hand below the parapet; "see the block of darkness it makes on the edge of what was formerly the Ghetto. Our castle during six hundred years; never once taken by assault; part of it pulled to the ground when the Pierleoni, those villainous filthy dogs, had crept inside it, and at last"—his voice shook, and he drew himself up in transcendent disdain—"sold—sold by a spendthrift and a madman—to the cousins that have it still, so much as is not fallen into those rubbish heaps." He was not minding me as he spoke: I had passed from his thoughts.

"You will recover it some day, Principe," was my soothing answer, given at random, without more

meaning than often attaches to a dialogue in which one of the speakers yields to his emotion and the other serves as a sounding-board or echo unconcerned. Gaetano wheeled round to examine my expression, with the same look of Medusa that I had perceived when he crossed Prince Camillo's barouche. It satisfied him, for he took my hand with a boyishly graceful gesture, and carried it to his lips. "Well said, well said, Signor Ardente," he cried, in a sudden flush of high spirits. "Give me good luck, and invidia crepa, envy go hang!"—flinging away my hand no less impetuously than he had seized it. "Here, on this spot, overshadowed with one of the darkest crimes that ever profaned our history—here, in the presence of the headless corpse of Beatrice Cenci—buried within this church—I accept the omen. We will have our Palazzo Sorelli again, and mine is the arm that shall recover it."

I was taken aback with the unexpected stroke of this awful reminiscence. I knew Beatrice had been interred before the high altar of San Pietro in Montorio; and history associated the crimes of Francesco Cenci with the penetralia of the palace that reared its gloomy walls in our front. The Cenci and the Sorelli were kinsmen. From this hour—so fantastic are the tricks which association of ideas will bring in its train—I detected a far-off resemblance to that unhappy girl, the Mary Stuart of the modern Roman chronicles, in Gaetano himself; there was such a blending in his pale olive features of sweetness with reserve and of melancholy with enthusiasm; his searching, meditative eyes put so wide a distance between him and those whom he addressed. I was drawn, repelled, overcome, occupied in my innermost soul with this stranger, whom I could not help loving. These are not every-day English sentiments, but what care I? Probably a spirit incarnate in such

a shape as Gaetano is not every-day English either. That he had broken out, dramatically if you please, into words at once foreboding and superstitious, affected me with some of his own rapture. "I prophesy all good things, Don Gaetano, to you and yours," was the cry that escaped me. Our eyes met. The clock of San Pietro rang out some chime, marking the half-hour; from that second you may date our friendship.

We walked backward and forward, the carriage keeping pace with us, and we read the city and the landscape as in a map outspread. The biting tramontana had swept the heavens of their last vapors; under a crystal cope three several distances revealed themselves. Near at hand, Rome, in a shading of quiet gray, yellow, brown, indescribably blended—a confusion of roofs and terraces, with churches, towers, columns all huddled in a mass of insignificant buildings; there is no plan visible, and nothing is easier than to see with the mind's eye that these erections stand upon ruins, and of ruins have been made. Such is the foreground. Travel beyond it to the middle distance—a Vega, green as the water-meadows of England, under this declining sun, with solitary houses scattered over its surface, and a line of arches soliciting the attention. That is the savage, fever-stricken Campagna, which Don Gaetano, while we fix our gaze upon it, calls "*la madre delle cose grandi, morte*,"—the mother of great dead things. It stretches out, and as the sky lightens with sunset, takes us on till we mark, as in a solid photograph, the ravines and pathways on the Sabine ranges above Tivoli, the snows which have lately fallen on Monte Gennaro, and, double-pinnacled behind this again, a white apparition which we know to be Monte Velino, away in the central Apennines, north of the Lago di Fucino. My companion points to an opening between the Sabine Hills and the finely molded characteristic

outline of the Latin group which rises close to our right hand. "Turn that way by Colonna on its lowly hilltop, in the plain," he half whispers, "and you will be on one of the roads to Roccaforte, a steep ascent, but delightful. You ride, of course, like all Englishmen—and shoot?"

"I ride, and shoot, and when I can't get exercise in that way, I fence as an indoor amusement."

"Bene, you shall do all three at the Rocca. We are sportsmen in the Pontine Marshes, and riding is our way of getting about in the Volscians. Have you hunted the wild boar?"

I shook my head. "Never, but I have eaten him in my time here; apro dolce was a favorite dish on high days and holidays with our cook."

"We will let you kill him and eat him again, and give you Falernian to wash him down. But listen, the Ave is sounding. We must mount and take the Pas-segiata Margherita quickly."

Before we entered the carriage, however, Gaetano stopped to take off his hat, cross himself devoutly, and recite his prayer. I like that silent pause which, in a city so crowded as Rome, comes when the Ave clangs from its multitudinous towers, and there is a brief stillness—the wing of an archangel resting over streets and squares, and casting a lightsome shadow ere it passes on. We were in a softened mood as we began our course along the Janiculum; neither of us spoke, and while we drove slowly, with eyes turned to the view on our right, there came the transformation from a pure, pearly whiteness to a glory, swift as lightning, of violet and purple, in which city, plain, and mountains were caught up. I may compare it to nothing so much as an infinitely fine veil—a water spread out, or a flame at its thinnest—but impenetrable as gleaming metal, the background to a picture distinct in all its lines and

masses, with snows faintly blushing in a distance that ran up to heaven. Gaetano had other thoughts. He reined the horse in, and pointing with his whip, cried nervously, "See, see—the crimson book. I have watched its leaves open thus a hundred times on this terrace—always crimson, the Apocalypse of Rome. It is the city of blood—blood of the Kings, the Consuls, the Emperors, the Martyrs—blood of the nobles and the nations—blood in the palace, temple, church, castle, market-place—blood in prison and on the scaffold—blood washed in blood. You do not know," he continued, still in this high strain, "the motto of the Sorelli. It is Rome's war-cry, '*Sangue lava sangue*'—blood will have blood. From the Colosseum to Nero's gardens, through which we are driving, always, always it is the old story—Rome must have blood. Look up to it in the sky above your head; behold it hanging like a purple winding-sheet out of heaven, this terrible city wrapt in it with all her treasures and her trophies. '*Sangue lava sangue*.' The crimson book of our greatness, our pride, and our doom."

The sanguine sunset had vanished, swiftly as it came, almost before Gaetano was recovered from his disquieting rhapsody. "You nourish imaginations that should be stifled in their birth," I said, laying my hand upon his shoulder. But still he muttered, "'*Sangue lava sangue*'—our pride and our doom." It was an ingrained superstition with him, which no sermonizing of mine could sponge away. I must admit the symbolism touched a fiber in myself. Who, with a sky so portentous outspread before his eyes, but would see in it, perhaps too often, the crimson book of fate, with all the Roman murders staining its leaves? How much more kindly seemed the gray twilight which fell as our carriage entered the avenue at last, and we moved between tall lines of darkling foliage up and down, while

St. Peter's strode into the night, a huge giant of stone, behind which the sun had disappeared.

We were almost in its shadow when a couple of outriders advanced smartly toward us, and at no great distance behind them a solitary horseman, wearing a cloak which hung down to his saddle. Don Gaetano pulled up at the appearance of the outriders, and bared his head when the cloaked horseman rode past. I knew it was the King. But I was astonished to perceive, drawn up on one side, stiff and silent as on parade, beneath the tall trees, a line of ecclesiastics in scarlet cassocks falling to their feet, not one of whom had lifted his three-cornered hat, or made the least sign of obeisance at the royal approach.

"Who are those churchmen?" I asked, as soon as we had got into our pace again. "Did they know it was the King?"

Gaetano laughed. "Oh, perfectly! They are foreigners—Germans and Hungarians—who come here to study and be priested. No one ever witnessed a salutation of theirs to the new rulers. Nay," he went on with a fierce and yet noble gesture, "neither did my uncovered head do reverence to the King of Italy. I saluted the House of Savoy. It is a line which has reckoned heroes and kept the keys of the Alps against all comers. For that I do it homage. But I cannot respect the man or his descendants who broke into the Quirinal with a blacksmith's crowbar."

"So those are Germans," I mused; "the last lingering squadron of the Holy Roman Empire. They will not own the native monarch. Do they watch and wait until a Kaiser from beyond the mountains shall be crowned on the slab of crimson porphyry, hard by the great door of St. Peter's?"

"I hate the Tedeschi," cried Gaetano. "When did they bring us aught save misfortune? We have had

enough of their Kaisers. Let them leave us Romans to ourselves."

The scarlet regiment had tramped along in the wake of the solitary horseman. As we turned in our seats to look after them, the shadow of the mighty dome, immeasurable now and huge as an eclipse, spread round the lonely figure which seemed to melt into its depths and be lost, while the city put on its cloak of darkness. How many generations had gone down to the same fate! The Queen of the World, Persephone, reigning over oblivion, her brow girt with poppies, sat there in majestic sorrow from age to age; and empires and dynasties, nations and rulers, were drawn into her embrace, forgot their own history, felt the magic swoon come over them as Lethe touched their lips. Could the lonely horseman from the Alps resist that witching charm? We sat peering after him into the night; then roused ourselves, and drove silently toward the electric glare which was beginning to make immense spaces of illumination, with shadows correspondingly deep, between the Bridge of Sant' Angelo and the Pincian Hill.

CHAPTER IV

WHO LOSES PAYS

WHEN I had told my story to this point—and you good creatures still sat over your embroidery, crochet-work, lace-mending, or what other pretense of the female mind answers to a man's puffing away at his cigarette in hours of idleness—just as I was arriving at the tragedy which has blown me up hither in a whirlwind, the storm swept off to Heaven knows where, the sky came in at all windows, an ocean of blue, and I flung aside my pen, and away went I upon the hill peaks avoiding the Piazza of Roccaforte. No more slaving over a desk for me in such crystal weather! Rain, sun, and wind had washed the whole world, making it a diamond with ten thousand fresh colors, and I must be out and taste the divine air. Now another interval has come and gone; a second strange thing has befallen me; and while my left arm is bandaged, I manœuvre with a pen as well as I can. Ah, Madonna Laura, you turn pale; I know your ways. Tush, my romantic sorella cugina; we are past our nursery rhymes. If the boy will get into scrapes, let him pay for them. Besides, my arm is not broken; I really did not lose above an ounce or two of blood. . . .

Now for a bit more of my adventure. The scene is Rome, not prosy London; time, end of the nineteenth century; personages—but that 's telling! Suffice it,

Arden Massiter is one of them. The rest will walk up as they are prompted from the cockpit under the boards. You remember, Miss Laura, that the reason of my abiding at Giovanni Finocchio's, instead of following Gaetano with the dog-like friendship which I had conceived for that olive-skinned hero, was because I had made up my mind to an interview with Tiberio, and Tiberio had to be found. What was his full name besides Tiberio? "Eh, Giovanni! Can you inform me how Tiberio calls himself at this time of day? Has he kept his London name, or exchanged it for half a dozen more? He stalked about in our meetings as Tiberio Sforza; I used partly to please, and as much to enrage him by taking off my hat to the Duke of Milan. Has his Ducal Highness abdicated?"

But Giovanni looked down and then aside, with a canine reluctance to face me.

"Talk that way, Signor, and you will drown in a glass of water," he grumbled at last. "Oh! Madonna, these English! Bold as lions, stiffnecked as mules. Avoid Tiberio Sforza, I entreat—duke or no duke—the devil roast him among his own chestnuts! When you see the mascalzone, the ruffian, the barattiere, it will be time to ask his name. Half a dozen? a hundred, rather! But I say nothing. One kneads the macaroni, another eats it. *Che mi fa a me, stò Tiberio?* Send him to Cortona; that will be best for you: make not yourself a Venetian ass."

My little friend's rudeness betrayed the depth of his fear. As I did not answer these lively proverbs and reiterated admonitions, he took me round the knees where I was sitting in his little saloon and began to whimper, "My adorable, you were good to me at Londra; be not wicked now. Go as you stand to this big devil of a Tiberio, he will assassinate you—not in *casa sua*, oh no, he has plenty of salt in his brains—

but here in my most unlucky house, or outside some gate, and you will be brought to me cold and frozen. Then what shall I do? Our customers like not a house where *la gente* has been refrigerated. Eh, no, they have good reason. And Giovanni will be ruined to please you."

He was actually sobbing. I have not analyzed the tears which an Italian sheds as easily as he smiles; but I suspect they contain a rare amount of gypsum or plaster of Paris, they dry so quickly. Nevertheless, Giovanni touched my feelings, and I could not argue his terrors away, for Tiberio was much better known to him than to me, and in all this consternation there might lurk some acquaintance with facts which I had yet to ascertain. A thought struck me.

"Come, you great simpleton," said I, patting him on his brown cheek, "there are more ways than one of playing the spy. Tiberio, when I walked and talked with him, was an honest, outspoken anarchist; but a dreamer, not an assassin. Why do you fix that label on his coat-tails?"

"Why has the devil red eyes?" asked Finocchio. "But take warning, Signor Ardente; I will not speak any more of him, not if you hoisted me on the cord. Basta, my mouth is sewed up."

"Bè—very well. But you can unsew it to teach me where I may get a disguise."

Instantly Giovanni was another man. His eyes flashed; his tongue was loosened. "What will you be, a friar, a contadino, a prelate?—no, you would not sacrifice your ebony whiskers—but name the person, I can buy you any vestments, old or new, of all cuts and colors, in the *Via dei Giubbonari*, and cheap too. Trust me; I know how to make a bargain." He had entered into my plan with the greatest alacrity, as if it were a pantomime.

"I will be none of all these, Messer Vanni. What I ask you to get me is very simple. I quite agree that, in this English make-up, to thrust myself in where his Ducal Highness is holding council with his ruffians in the Via dei Serpenti, might mean mischief. A dreamy anarchist in Soho, he will be, for what I can tell, something like a conspirator in the Rione Monti. But though I used to act fairly well in our private theatricals, I am not going to make an ass of myself. A fine Capuccino or contadino they would think me, with my Anglo-Saxon limbs. No, no; buy me at some second-hand shop—it will never do to put on brand new clothes—the ordinary brown suit of which I see specimens by the dozen in every Italian crowd, and add to them the sugar-loaf hat, with a long black cloak such as people wear in the evenings. Dress me out like a common individual of the mezzo ceto: not rich, not poor, not distinguished by a hair from fifty thousand others. Do such frequent the Trattoria Ranieri?"

"But yes, on account of its excellent wine," said Giovanni, expostulating, and at the same time encouraging with his shoulders. "It has a name for wine and fritters. Music, also, some dancing; everything proper. With money you can buy the moon."

"Go, then, and buy it, or as much as we want, in the Giubbonari," said I, "but I wish you could purchase new second-hand clothes, Gianni mio. That is the worst of my masquerading. Cicerinella's cat, a clean animal, will be sorry for me."

"Eh, we will fumigate them with sulphur," he exclaimed, laughing. "How much will the Signor spend on his costume?"

I left it to him, knowing that he would take his perquisite—the palm-oil, without which nothing goes smooth in Italy—and the course of the day beheld me transmuted into a new skin; literally so, for we judged

it expedient to darken my complexion, which is by no means fair, and my hands became a beautiful brown. At the same time we disguised the English cut of my hair with a peruke, as well as thickened my eyebrows with a little coloring. I felt, when all this was accomplished, hot, strange, and uncomfortable. And then a curious thing happened. I was always fond of talking Italian, as you have reason to know, remembering my burlesque goings on in that language for your delectation; and now when the Northern skin was shed, the wig adjusted, the cloak hanging in right Trastevere fashion from my shoulder, I became the man of my get-up, felt the genuine dramatic instinct, pitched John Bull out o' window, and took my heavy-headed bamboo cane in hand as if I were managing a damascened rapier. Even Finocchio was, or affected to be, in admiration at the sight. "Veramente," he exclaimed again and again, walking round me and giving my habiliments the finishing touch, "a comedian of the first water! Where is the Signor Inglese now? Gone, drowned, buried! Acting the rest will be to you as 'a peeled pear, fall down my throat.' But, a moment, Signor—speak, speak always the good Roman; you have it, words and accent. No Trastevere! They would catch you; it is hard; I speak it not myself."

These were words of wisdom; and I promised to obey. When the bright lights of the evening had died into a dim violet heaven, and the foot-paths lay dark, a tall, if not gaunt and grim, figure was sauntering slowly along through the streets of Rome, holding before its face the skirt of a tragic-looking mantle from time to time, and reconnoitering as in an enemy's neighborhood. Creeping round corners, twisting back on his trail, and appearing to lose himself a dozen times over, this pilgrim of the night at length emerged into the Via dei

Serpenti, after a course which well deserved the name in its spiral obliquities.

The Street of Serpents is neither clean, nor well lighted, nor picturesque. Its lofty houses, crammed with life and poverty, lonesome though side by side, grimy, foul, drab-colored, without a single token of noble architecture, and as uniform as a London back alley, stretch on from the opera-like frivolities of the Via Nazionale to the Colosseum. It has the wasted air of Alsatia. Here, long ago, ran the noisy street called Suburra, with its taverns haunted by soldiers, gladiators, lost women, and degraded men, of which that splendid old Salvator Rosa—whom we term Juvenal—has drawn us some lively sketches. Many trattorie stood open, inviting the passers-by, out of streets now struck chill and swept by a piercing wind, to take shelter in their warmth and brightness. But few pedestrians were abroad. The tall, gaunt personage went to and fro, peering up at names over narrow portals which baffled his eyesight; and he had traveled down three fourths of the long thoroughfare when the Trattoria Ranieri, more conspicuous than most, shone across his footsteps. He pulled his cloak straight, entered boldly, and taking a seat half-way between the door and the raised platform at the farther end, demanded a flask of red wine.

The trattoria was crowded. A vivid little piece of tomfoolery on the stage between two girls in peasant costume and a sportsman who had lost his way held the audience spellbound. No one had leisure to observe the last comer, and the wooden pillar against which he happened to be reclining shielded his features when he began to sip his Marino. Still more effective was the heavy, unpleasant tobacco-smoke that rose from a forest of cigars and filled with cloud every nook and crevice of the trattoria.

It was, I must allow, an admirable scene. The foggy lights magnified, and at the same time softened the details of a picture such as, if you did not know it was the interior of a Roman eating-house, would certainly have been styled Dutch or Flemish. "Boors Drinking" you might have written underneath it. One side of the room, fitted up with bottles of every shape and size, gleamed furtively at you, sparkled on the sly, and occasionally winked out a sudden flash of glory, to be quenched the next instant. Thanks to the universal haze, the stage-front, with its gaudy painting, drew further away, until you began to dream it might be an opening into some unknown fairyland. The heads and faces of a curiously mixed assembly wavered through the smoke, were not still one instant, but came and went as by the uncertain touches of an artist sketching them. And on the tables the glasses, plates, decanters, fruits—with hands stretched out above them or heads bent in rapid conversation—made an olla podrida of impressions, uncertain but most vivid, which the eye took in with delighted interest, but not even Teniers could have reproduced in its dull brilliancy. There was plenty of movement now, in spite of the attention which the living marionettes on the stage received from an enthusiastic audience. I studied these as closely as the smoky radiance would permit. No Tiberio was there. Would he, indeed, be so much an habitué of this *café chantant*—for it was nothing else—as Finocchio had hinted?

A mixed company! Men, like myself, of the *mezzo ceto*, decent in dress and behavior; others of the working-class, rough and unpolished, wearing no holiday garments; country folk in the hideous costume of the Roman rustic; and among the many young girls not one above the lowest rank. What should Tiberio be doing here? I knew him for a man of a certain culti-

vation, fastidious in his outward show, in some sort a gentleman; yet I could fancy that he would descend from his own level to make converts to the creed which he professed. But there was no sign of political discussion in the trattoria. Men ate and drank and smoked peaceably. As the tables were cleared and the hours moved on, packs of cards were brought out; the ivory cubes began to rattle; most of the girls slipped away, the marionettes made their bow and disappeared into the thickening haze. I continued to sip my red wine, exhausted all the newspapers within reach, felt sleepy and absurd, and was almost annoyed (so perverse a humor comes while waiting) that no one took the least notice of me. After several hours I gave up the hope of seeing Tiberio that night. I left Ranieri's; a brisk walk round the Colosseum revived me; and I went to bed promising myself better luck next time.

No, not next time, nor yet the next. On four consecutive nights I ventured, always taking the same precautions, into a danger that grew more formidable because it gave no token of its existence. I joked and flouted Finocchio—he was playing me a scurvy trick, and I should advertise for my lost Tiberio in the “Tribuna” or “Don Chischiotte.” His panic increased. When I had explored the trattoria three several times, he begged me in the name of all saints and angels, of San Gennaro and Sant’ Andrea and the ever blessed Mother of God, to go there no more. But I was determined to run my Tiberio down. And Saturday night beheld me, with my cloak, my fiaschetto, and my heavy-headed bamboo, reclining against the pillar and enjoying my Teniers’ picture through the haze.

Hitherto, I had spoken only monosyllables, or the shortest phrases, in reply to the civilities of the bottega, while to others I said nothing at all. To-night the crowd was greater than ever; Saturday is pay-day in

Rome, as in England, with the inevitable consequence of more spending and more drinking; here, too, was a little more gambling. I sat and watched, wondering if I were not the object of suspicion in my turn. An hour or two passed. It was getting late, and the smoke rose in clouds to the ceiling, when a couple of young fellows—contadini, by their appearance—came and sat in front of me, with a dirty pack of cards between them. What game they were playing I knew not. They won and lost respectively, shuffled and cut, and growled a jargon which I had never heard before; then, without rhyme or reason, as I thought, began to raise their voices, to argue and gesticulate, and at last to wax furious. Overturning their chairs, they sprang to their feet. An open space was made around them by the sudden retreat of their neighbors to right and left; but my pillar was immovable, and so was I. There had been a great hubbub of conversation going on; these additional sounds made no more impression than if they were thrown out in a storm; not a soul minded; and I felt that the picture of still life had got quickened, when, presto, knives were flashing in the air, and my two young men seemed in deadly combat.

Still the assembly regarded not; had these been swords, I should have said it was a fencing match; but knives meant murder, and there was no time to lose. In a dream I heard the words which now decided me. One of the combatants was as handsome as a youthful Apollo; his rival was a shaggy brute with the mask of a satyr; and from those hirsute lips I caught the words, sickening in their distinctness, "*Adesso, ti taglio la faccia*" ("Now I will slit your face"). It was too much. I leaped from my chair, and aiming a straight blow with my cane at the satyr's forehead, struck him across the eyes; with a second blow I had floored him on the bricks of the trattoria.

An immense uproar followed. The young Apollo took to his heels. The satyr rose, grasped his knife, and came at me like a demon, howling imprecations with the voice of a town bull. He had his knife, and I my bamboo, flexible as a bit of steel and nearly as hard. I drove it at him again, striking for the face as my only chance. He rushed forward; the knife grazed my neck, and I brought down my weapon sharply on his head as he slipped along by me. This time he fell and did not rise. But before I could control my hand or my feeling, once more the cane descended—and all my passion gave it momentum—on the prostrate figure. I was in a sudden blinding of rage, wonderful even to myself. The villain still clutched his knife; I was stooping to unclasp it from fingers which held it like a vice, when two carabinieri passed in, and the trattoria was emptied by the simultaneous flight of all within it in the twinkling of an eye.

As my murderer gave no sign of life, beyond the red stream which was flowing from his mouth, I stood up and faced the carabinieri. Fine, stalwart fellows they were, grave and courteous, well disciplined, and apparently used to these battles of the coltellata, or fighting with knives; for without delay they took hold of me and demanded my weapons.

"Behold all the weapon I have," was my answer, handing over the bamboo, which they carefully examined.

"It weighs uncommon heavy for a cane," said one of them. "Is it loaded? It is not a sword-stick?" eyeing me as I stood in the middle of the bottega, from which it was hopeless to think of escaping.

"It is simply a walking-stick which I have used in self-defense," I said quietly. "Stoop to this gentleman on the floor; you will find a knife between his fingers."

The ruffian lay motionless, bleeding still, but with not a creature near him except myself and the soldiers. Mine host, Ranieri, seemed lost in his professional duties behind the bar; the two or three waiters who had not absconded were standing silent, as far off as they could get, in a brown study of the ceiling or the floor. One of the carbineers, bending down, unclenched the closed fist with some difficulty, and picking up the knife as it dropped, held it on high. A few streaks of blood were on its surface, which the guardian of the law contemplated, and then, turning to me, remarked, "You are wounded, Signor, in the neck. Was it done with this?"

I put up my hand to my collar, and drew it away wet. "It is a mere scratch," said I. "Won't you look to the man? He may bleed to death."

"Not he!" was the cool rejoinder; "let him bleed. It will bring him round as well as if a doctor had lanced him. But did he strike you with this knife?"

An intense stillness in the air, while every eye was fixed on me, left a tingling sense that I was now going down into deep waters. Should I charge the satyr with assault, what would be the consequence? Penal servitude, perhaps, for him, as he richly deserved; but for me, what? Attendance in court, unpleasant cross-questioning, the appearance of being caught in a foolish or mad disguise, and the spoiling of my plans as well as the end of my adventures. No, my mind was soon made up.

"It is not worth mentioning," I said with an air of unconcern. "The fellow was probably drunk, and meant no harm. Certainly, I am not going to charge him."

The carbineers looked at one another. Ranieri drew a long breath; the waiters came forward out of their trance, to observe me more closely.

"Here, Ranieri," said the senior officer, "you know this contadino. What do they call him? Where does he come from?"

The padrone had put on that mask of Roman sulkiness which is as impenetrable as a thunder-cloud. But he answered, "Eh, Dio mio, where does he come from? Certainly, yes, I have seen him often. What is he called? He is called Renzaccio—Big Larry—and he belongs—where does he belong to?"—with a ruminating air as if uncertain—"to Cartena, mi pare."

"Cartena!" returned the gendarme. "A bad pedigree, and a den of thieves. He is no great shakes himself, I take it."

The padrone washed his hands of him. "Buon pezzo, cattivo pezzo"—good or bad—it was all one to Ranieri. Men came for their fiaschetto and their polenta; that was what concerned him.

"Well, Renzaccio," said the younger man, touching the satyr with a disdainful boot, "you have broken the law, anyhow. We arrest you for carrying an illegal weapon. So come along."

And as at a magic invocation, Renzaccio unclosed his villainous cold eyes, staggered to his feet, and began wiping the blood away which had streamed from the corner of his mouth on shirt-collar and jacket. His first glance was toward the officer, who still retained the knife—an ugly looking instrument about six inches long, as thin and sharp as a razor. Taken with the manner, as our legal phrase used to run, it was hopeless for the culprit to make a defense. But he glared upon me, with drawn eyebrows, in a peculiarly menacing fashion, and said in his throat, "Why don't you take him, then? He tried to kill me with that life-preserver of his."

"It is not forbidden to carry a stick," answered the officer coldly. "Come, that's enough," putting a pair

of handcuffs on him, and then addressing me once more, "You make no charge of unlawful wounding, Signor? Look well to it; now is your time."

"I make none. And as I have not broken any law, I wish you good evening, gentlemen."

I was pushing beside them to the door, but found myself gently stopped. The senior officer had put his hand on me. "Your name and address," he said; "we cannot allow you to leave until it is given."

Here was a quandary! What a pretty pickle I had thrown myself into, with my masquerading and sugar-loaf hat and stage mantle! The carbineers had spoken to me throughout in the third person, while giving Renzaccio the contemptuous second singular; I dared not even suppose that they believed me to be an Italian. There was nothing for it but frankness. I pulled out an English envelop addressed to me at Finocchio's.

"That is my name, gentlemen."

They made an effort to read and pronounce it, with an amused gleam, between wonder and admiration, in those keen looks of theirs. "Ah, Inglese!" said the elder, and his more youthful companion echoed, with a droll expression, "Inglese—matto!" as having now discovered the key to all my proceedings. They conferred in whispers apart, holding Renzaccio in leash the while, though he seemed to have given up all expectation of deliverance.

I felt more uncomfortable than I showed; an appearance before the magistrates, either as witness or culprit, was by no means to my taste. However, at the end of their conference, the senior approached me again, and, with a polite flourish of his hat, pointed to the door.

"Vossignoria may go at present," were the first words I caught; "should you be wanted, we will send for you."

I was out in a second, rejoicing over my good fortune, and, as on previous evenings, directed my rapid steps toward the Colosseum. Skirting its southeastern arc, I had turned into the pathway which divides it from the ascent to the Cœlian, when I became aware that some one was creeping stealthily along behind me, in the shadow of the ruins. I stopped and could see nothing; I walked on a few paces, and, wheeling sharply round, came face to face with a man of about my own height, who had almost stumbled against me. We both cried out. But he, in the darkness, catching me by the cloak, whispered, "Zitto, zitto, non abbia paura, Signor Inglese!"

I shook him roughly off. "Let go, sir," I said in a whisper as energetic as his own, and I lifted my life-preserver. It seemed likely that the name would be merited more than once that night.

In the dim starlight beyond the shadow of the amphitheater, and at the spot to which I moved hastily, it was possible to make out who had spoken to me. The man still followed, whispering, "Zitto, zitto, non abbia paura!"

I recognized the voice, and with it the person. "Ah, you are that young Apollo," I said loudly. "My lad, I saved your life just now. What would you have?"

He seized my skirt again with both hands. "Madonna, it is true! You saved me. My name is not Apollo, but Carluccio. Signor, a thousand thanks. But you owe me thanks as much. Listen to me."

"I owe you thanks! What for? Let go my cloak."

He released it, and stood humbly waiting. "Signor foreigner, you are in debt to me for your life. I will tell you how. Renzaccio and I, and some others"—his voice fell into an undertone which I could only just construe—"saw you these nights at Ranieri's, always tranquil, always observant. We ask ourselves, are you

a spy? They say yes; I say no. I like something in your face, and I say no. To-night you come once more. We talk, we wrangle, we cannot be certain. At last that malandrino from Cartena and myself agree to play cards over it. If I win two games out of three, you are an honest man, we let you go. If Renzaccio wins—"

"Yes, if Renzaccio wins," I repeated, for the youth had checked himself, overcome with an emotion, the source of which was not apparent. He seemed to prick up his ears and listen for steps behind us.

"Draw aside under the arch," he said; "fear not, I will not hurt you."

It was perhaps foolish, but I let him guide me. We were now within the Arch of Constantine, and the lamps of the Via Gregorio twinkled before us.

"If *he* won," Carluccio said in the same undertone, "we were both to draw our knives and make you cold."

I saw it all as he spoke. The mist filling the trattoria, myself leaning back against the pillar watching them, and these two men playing within a yard of me for my life. Acknowledge that it was a piquant situation!

"Well, what happened?" I asked him.

"Per Bacco, what happened? This happened. I won the first game. Renzaccio, accidente to him—the Lord strike him—won the second. As we got deep in the third, all was going in my favor—in yours, Signor, do you understand?—but no, he would not have it. He cheated; I saw him cheat. His fingers were itching to make you cold—you would not be the first—and it was his ugly hour, when he must draw blood or let blood. So he cheated, and I caught him at it. From words we came to blows; we drew our angel guardians. I was not for striking him at first; but he—ah, if your cane was not down on him, where would

my face be now? Finely adorned with a sfregio d'amore, cut and slashed like a pumpkin. Do you believe me now?"

I gave him my hand. "Yes, Carluccio, I do. And you must believe me. I am not a spy. All I wanted was to meet a friend who never came."

"It is well. But take warning. The police have let you run and put Renzaccio in the cage. He will have two years for carrying an edged weapon in his pocket. Think you he has no friends to do you a kind turn? Signor foreigner, twenty pairs of eyes, and mine as well, kept watching you when we ran out of the trattoria. I told the rest to go home; I would track you, and I must. But wherever you sleep this night, in the morning leave Rome, leave Italy. Take the earliest train to Livorno, to Naples, and get on board a steamer, the first you can find. Renzaccio will be revenged if he escapes, and if he does not escape. You saved my face, and I tell you all I dare. Now, in the name of God, forward."

I wrung his hand a second time, quickened my pace, and went swiftly by the Via San Gregorio, the Cerchi, and San Teodoro—a long round, but the only route accessible to me since the Forum has been shut in for excavations—until I reached the Capitol, my friend or enemy (I could hardly tell which) keeping step for step, but speaking no more than I did. When we had come to Marcus Aurelius on his brazen horse, I took a flying leap down the great stairs in front of the Palazzo dei Conservatori, flung myself into the first cab which was standing there, shook off Carluccio, who attempted to spring in after me, and told the vetturino to drive straight into the Corso. My haste and passion stirred him up as by contagion. He drove with a scream and a flourish, and went madly forward until he ran into a throng of carriages at the door of some mansion near the Co-

lonna, from which lights were glancing. There I sprang out, and my Jehu took without a murmur the English gold which I thrust into his hand. Amid the crush of vehicles and foot-passengers I stopped to consider. I dared not go home to Giovanni. What should I do next?

Then I remembered that Don Gaetano was lodging at his Circolo. Would he be at home? How would he receive me? There was nothing for it but to make the attempt. Still keeping, as far as possible, away from the electric radiance which came down in floods on the Corso, and with a tumultuous yet not undelighted heart—for the adventure had its own joy—I moved on almost to the Piazza del Popolo, and made my way in among a company of well-dressed youths to the atrium, or lower court of the club-house. Don Gaetano was in the smoking-room. I begged his attendance for an urgent business; he came out in evening dress, with a cigarette between his fingers, and what was his astonishment when a stranger addressed him, in whose thick eyebrows and excessively dark features he was bidden, with due precautions, to recognize Arden Massiter! But as my tale proceeded, and the name of the trattoria slipped from me, the Prince held up a warning finger.

“Name no names,” he said quietly, “you will find it more advisable. You want a *pied-à-terre*. Come with me.”

CHAPTER V

UDOLPHO

THE morning marched over snowy Apennines, and cast before it long diamond shafts into the still slumbering Campagna, when Gaetano, erect on the driving seat of his swift conveyance, bade me remark where a heavy white mist clung to the mountains, toward which we had lately set our faces.

"As soon as that clears away, behold the Volscians!" he cried exultingly; and then, with the tender look which indicated a new strain of reflection, "I know not if you will think them beautiful, or be pleased with your prison. Wild and poor, unformed in their habits are our people, rude as the rocks they mount and descend like their native goats. It is a strange fancy, is it not, to bring you into the Monti Lepini when you are escaping from brigands?" And he laughed and drove on through the morning land.

We had been passing between the Latin and the Sabine range, having quitted Rome at earliest dawn by the Porta San Giovanni; and now, after several hours, while the mist scattered and great gulfs of blue opened above our heads, we left behind us towns I will not name, and crossed the Via Latina. We had traveled a roundabout journey, not choosing to follow the ordinary route from Rome to Velletri, but making a wider cast, for reasons which my adventures of the night be-

fore justified. There was no attendant with us, but the young Prince knew his business, and showed himself a superb Automedon. For me, I talked little, rehearsing in fancy all I had gone through, and endeavoring, somewhat vainly, to piece out a scheme that should bring into connection Tiberio, Renzaccio, and my well-wisher, the Apollo of the Street of Serpents. Was Finocchio acquainted with them all?

Gaetano had more insight than I, undoubtedly; but, whatever he knew, his lips were sealed. At half a word he understood me when I began, in the hall of the Circolo, to explain my appearance at an hour, and in a costume, so unexpected. He made light of the legal functionaries who might be inquiring after the eccentric Englishman. Not so of Carluccio and his warning.

"Già, you must say addio to Rome before twelve hours are past," said he. "You would not be safe in a squadron of carbineers. Come without tuck of drum to Roccaforte. In the castle no one will dare to attack you—nay, we have brigands of our own upon whom we can reckon," he added, with a grim laugh; "and now I will see that you get accommodation here instead of risking discovery at another hotel. For certain, you cannot go back to yours."

"Detto, fatto," done as soon as said. And here, as the splendid morning rode up toward noon, we were skirting the hills, with an ever-widening prospect over marsh and green field, and a line of silver drawing out and along upon a clear horizon—it was the Tuscan Sea between Ostia and Terracina. We went at a gallop, though the paths grew steeper. In every direction there was the sound or sight of falling and creeping streams, reedy and sullen, or crisp, sparkling, foamy, under thick branches of the holm-oak and amid clumps of chestnut, arbutus, and other trees unknown. A

chapel of the Madonna, with its four whitewashed walls, wire fencing, and artificial flowers stuck between the meshes, greeted us now and again. But, oftener still, I observed on the roadside heaps of stones, into which a cross of rude formation—two black chips, it might be, nailed together—was thrust upright.

"What does the cross mean with that heap of stones?" I inquired.

Gaetano looked and turned away. "It means a misfortune," he said calmly; "a murdered man. You will do well to pray for him. But I forgot, the Inglesi don't believe in prayer."

I think he was muttering a verse or two of the *De Profundis*, for I could hear the stern adjuration, "*Si iniquitates observaveris, Domine—Domine, quis sustinebit?*"

"Ay, indeed," was my inward comment, "if every violent death in that accursed plain, and on these lonesome hills, is to call forth another, Lord, when shall be the end?"

But I was careful not to disturb Gaetano at his prayers, remembering that tremendous outburst on Montorio. The Italian, I felt, had a volcano in his heart—how unlike the ice-brook temper of the Northern!

"Look up, look up!" exclaimed my companion, lashing his steed more from excitement than cruelty, as we reached a turn in the road. "No more mist; there is the sun, and there—higher still, you must throw your head back as I do—there is Roccaforte! Last refuge of the Sorelli, I salute you!"

His hat was off, I lifted mine, and throwing back my head, gazed into the lofty sky. Then I too murmured, "*Roccaforte, ti saluto.*" Almost perpendicularly above us, on a double ledge projecting, with mountain crests far and near to keep it company, stood the

ancient town and the fortress that crowned its height. Bare on this side of verdure, it shone, under the great illumination, with the intense yellowish-white of ivory; the limestone rock had a blinding glare upon it, and I shielded my eyes for pain. Three or four churches lifted their towers above a huddled mass of irregular, tumbling streets. The castle soared up out of its woods, and from the main building rose turrets of mediæval masonry at uncertain intervals. It was an eagle's nest.

Still the paths ascended, but where they forked to the upper and lower piazza we took what seemed to me a Roman road, flagged with blocks of lava, and between narrow walls we made for a high gateway which commanded every foot of our going. A single piece of artillery placed there would have blown us to limbo. Under the Norman arch, into a vast courtyard, across the pavement of cobbled stones, and to a second gate, such was our course—all that we set eyes on being dark, ancient, frowning, speechless, but the more significant, a castle of Bluebeard or the Maréchal de Retz. I spied a huge oval shield above this second entrance, which bore on a field gules a mailed arm, holding a naked dagger argent, and round its edge in worn letters I deciphered the words quoted by my young protector, "*Sanguè lava sangue.*" The motto and the device were well matched. There, in a sentence, was summed up the recorded history of Roccaforte.

Dying now, and its arm broken, this proud family, which had given to the Church many cardinals and more than one pope, whose marble monuments lined the walls of Ara Cœli or Santa Maria in Campitelli; while its lay princes had contended with the Papacy, beaten down their enemies in battle, levied blackmail on the travelers that passed by on the Via Latina toward Naples, and never knew what it was to obey

any law which themselves had not made. As we entered this enormous tomb, in which only ghosts were dwelling, and the staircase, broad enough for a regiment to march up it, invited our ascent, Dante's melancholy stanza hummed in mine ear—

Le vostre cose tutte hanno lor morte
Si come voi; ma celasi in alcuna
Che dura molto, e le vite son corte.

This existence of the Sorelli in their mountain fastness, what was it save a tedious agony? Their day was over. The world had other tasks than medieval violence and Machiavellian intrigue could accomplish; I marveled, and still it is a wonder to me, that the dead will not bury their dead. But I was among them, for lo! a serious, dark-visaged man, well-stricken in years, at the head of the staircase, who seemed in no hurry to speak until Don Gaetano challenged him by the name of Ser Angelo—it was the steward—and asked where his father might be. Ser Angelo pointed to the door in front of us, which was opening as we landed in the stone corridor. The young Signor motioned me to follow, and we entered a saloon of great dimensions, lofty, frescoed, tessellated, with gilt furniture of the seventeenth century, and mirrors which multiplied all this as in a palace at once transparent and unoccupied. The hall was, in fact, empty, except for an aged man who drew back from the door as we came in. When his eye fell upon Don Gaetano he smiled, and gave him his hand to kiss in stately fashion, waiting with a formidable air of politeness until the stranger had been introduced. It was Orazio, Duke of Roccaforte.

What a magnificent presence! Taller and broader than his son, straight as an arrow, with perfectly pale, wrinkled face, snow-white hair and beard, and two

great eyes, which had in them the light of the carbuncle. This apparition, worthy to be a king, was clad from head to foot in sable—a dark velvet dressing-gown,—surmounted by a turban-like head-dress, from which his silvery locks escaped, falling almost to the shoulders. His long, nervous fingers grasped mine, while Gaetano was striking out my history in rapid words; I felt as one might do in the eagle's talons, secure from every other foe, helpless in a clasp so unyielding.

Be it observed that to Gaetano I had revealed none of my connection with Tiberio Sforza; and thus, while he told what was simple truth, my adventure in the *Via dei Serpenti* put on the air of a freak and a mere accident.

"I have known Englishmen," said the Prince, releasing my hand, "they were fair as cherubs. You, Signor, might pass for one of ourselves, with your dark eyes and hair. Pardon me, are you altogether English?" He spoke in slow, measured accents, pausing between the words.

"My father's grandfather married a lady from Ravenna. It is to her I am indebted for the resemblance which your Highness has observed. I have always felt a deep regard—a passion, I might say—for the poets and artists of this beautiful land of yours. When I was quite young I learned Italian; as a lad I spent many months in Rome and Venice. If to think Italian thoughts could mold the features, I should certainly be not unlike some of your countrymen."

The Prince listened, without interrupting me, to this little speech. I wanted not to sail under false colors. If he should take me for the ordinary traveling John Bull, to whom Italy is at best a museum and at worst so many hours of dry sunshine, it would not be my fault. He motioned me to sit down, but remained

standing himself. "The Cardinal has written to me about you," he said, in a tone of meditation. "Your signor father, he tells me, is rich and powerful, and you are his eldest son; but there is some difference between you. Why did you leave him?" All this was uttered with much feeling and an old man's gracious mildness, though with a suspicion of reproach that I could well understand. Impossible to take offense. But equally impossible to begin a long story and enter on questions of economics, social righteousness, and the new era, there and then.

"We differed as fathers and sons will do when the world is changing," I said.

"But your father has disinherited you? Has he put your younger brother first, made him the heir? His Eminence was told so."

Poor Dick! I wonder who put that story about. Fancy Dick, Laura, with his racing, and gaming, and all you know and don't know, coming in for the Massiter estate! And fancy my father handing it over to him with his blessing! I shook my head with an unbelieving smile; it was too grotesque. The Prince caught my meaning instantly.

"Then you are still the heir?" he concluded. "You will return to your island, be a noble and enjoy great property, as soon as you are reconciled to your signor father?"

"My father is always willing to make friends, but on his own conditions. It rests with me to take them or leave them. At present, I leave them."

"It is always *la politica*," interposed Don Gaetano, "there as well as here, beyond the Alps and in the Apennines. Signor Massiter, like our Camillo," he said with unmistakable bitterness, "wants to move with the times. Or is it against the times, Signor? Perhaps against them."

"I am not of Don Camillo's party, at all events," said I. "This Italy which was made at Turin is neither my Italy nor yours. I think of something far more humane, far more heroic. I hate modern England. Judge, then, if I detest the new Italy, which is only a base caricature of it."

The Prince said nothing, but he exchanged a glance with his son which Gaetano returned; and then the younger man added joyously, "I will convert you to my views, Signor Massiter; but now it is time you had refreshment."

"Surely," said his father, "my house is at his disposal for as long as he will remain. But Gaetano," pulling out his watch, "Don Antonio is in the chapel. Have you heard holy Mass to-day?"

"We were driving all these hours, and could not stop for Mass. Are you ready to go, father? I will go too. Our guest shall breakfast meanwhile."

"No, take me with you," I said; "breakfast can wait. I am not a Catholic, but seeing your devotions, though I do not share in them, is an old habit of mine; it does me good."

Accordingly we went all three, by other steps, and through long, low passages, into a wing of this huge rambling castle, which looked on the ravine to the southeast. A gloomy chapel, though once resplendent with gold, and still displaying a fine sanctuary, in violet and yellow marbles, with some uncertain outlines of wall-painting, ruined by the damp and neglect of centuries. At the altar, in front of a heavy pediment supported by columns, stood the priest in his vestments, for the service was beginning—a beautiful old man, slender and wasted, with venerable white hair and delicate hands. In the chapel knelt or stood a few servants of the house, wearing that air of unconcern which, if it conceals piety, does so with entire success, and

which in any but Italians would denote the most profound indifference. What it signifies in them I never could make out to my own satisfaction. The Prince was attentive at his prayers; Don Gaetano never took his eyes off the celebrating priest and his motions about the altar. But for me, as a heretic, it was permissible to let my thoughts wander a little, especially as neither preaching nor singing diversified the rite which went forward in absolute whispers.

I had observed, from the first moment of coming into the chapel, a tribune on my left, such as, in Italian churches, often serves for the choir, with an admirable wrought-iron screen dividing it from us. The interstices of the screen were large, and behind them I caught an occasional glimpse of divers female figures—the ladies of the castle, no doubt, and their attendants, who, after the fashion of an Eastern seraglio, were thus protected from contact with the world outside. It was quite possible, nevertheless, to remark not only that they wore the becoming lace veils thrown over their heads, which recall Spanish customs in the Peninsula, but that two of them were noble and the rest their hand-maidens. These two for the most part knelt, with eyes downcast or overshadowed by the outstretched palm; yet once or twice they stood up, fairly in view, and then I could see their features. No, I am not going to attempt a sketch of them; but I will give you my impression, such as it was, for I have not the gift of a French falcon, that flies at all game, and I saw these ladies only as they might have appeared at a window one moment, to disappear the next.

It was not the ray of sunlight, piercing through a dim air, and resting upon these two heads that drew my gaze with an illusory splendor. Had you seen it, Laura, your fine sense would have warned you, as my ruder faculty warned me, that something strange was

happening. The heads lifted up were as unlike as youth and age in this Southern region, where contrasts are extreme. But on the face of the elder lady, as on that of her companion, I marked the light which in no other human countenances have I known to be reflected, of pure and perfect ecstasy. It did not fall upon them from sun or sky; it was kindled above inward fires; it burned transparently, a flame in a lamp of alabaster, rosy and white and still. Neither of these praying figures saw the forms of things around them. With eyes open, fixed upon the air, they dreamed their dream, abolishing at a stroke the whole place, if not, perchance, transforming it to the color and shape of the realities that held them captive. A consummate actor—a musician in the moment of his triumphant utterance—might look so divinely, that beatific smile on his half-open lips. But here the music was silent, or to my gross ears inaudible. The light never wavered, if I might judge by this, that twice over, at the interval of many minutes, these wonderful creatures rose from their kneeling posture, and each time ecstasy shone upon their faces.

“Saints of an old religion,” I murmured to myself, “initiated and steeped in it, by some lost power, as of primeval poetry, or day-dreaming, that grasps the solid and goes down to the waters of life, where we should fall through into the void.” I might have kept staring at the tribune; they would never have noticed me. When I turned to the altar, I could recall every line of both faces, but with the radiance, superhuman, ineffable, upon them which perhaps revealed a beauty destined to vanish away when that veil was withdrawn. The younger lady had lived in many a gallery of pictures; not to-day for the first time had I examined the proud Roman head framed in its sunny hair, under the black veil—hair which was without ornament or jewel,

bound classically upon a large forehead and over lucent eyes, themselves a golden gray in the flood of tenderness through which they shone. I had often followed on canvas the drooping curve of those full breathing lips, which could bend and ply themselves to all the tones of existence; but their key was a passionate energy. I marked decision in the gesture with which the head was thrown back, if also abandonment to the coming of the spirit; and something akin to the lovely dawn, to the dew and the nightingale, smote upon me from the unclouded brow;—I thought of all fresh morning influences, of the sun scattering roses in the east, and the shadows fleeing away, while to myself, as at an immense distance, the vision ascended in a sky of purest ether. In that instant I caught an idea hitherto beyond the reaches of my soul; the Madonna was no poet's feigning; could I have thrown this ecstasy on a surface outside me, I might have equaled the San Sisto in truth, if not in sweetness and felicity of drawing.

The other lady—I cannot think of her now. We shall meet her again, and then will be time enough to touch on her description. Call her *la pinzochera*—the devout Sibyl, anything you will. She, too, had the ecstatic look which makes beautiful, and yet it was rather as a foil or a contrast that she appeared by the side of this Beatrice. They were not mother and daughter; I knew that well. The Prince had lost his wife many years ago. In the fair young Ecstatica, clothed upon with such glorious colors, I recognized a likeness of feature, combined with as remarkable an unlikeness of expression, to Don Gaetano. His sister—of so much I could be nowise in doubt. The question, however, pursued me without ceasing, whether I should come to speech and conversation with a lady so young and still unmarried, though I was a guest be-

neath her father's roof. Would she be kept always in the seraglio until I had passed out of range?

Laura shakes her head dubiously. What was the Ecstatica to me? Why, of course, nothing; what could she be to me? Therefore I felt perfectly *en règle* in wishing to explore the mind, or to judge in some degree of the temperament, which answered to an appearance at once singular and tantalizing. Not every day do we come across a saint. Our English world, large as it imagines itself, breeds nothing equal to this austere inspiration; it abounds in the benevolent, the truthful, the energetic; it has neither saints nor miracle-workers. It is so modern that it cannot even allow them to be possible; it sets them down in its dictionaries with griffons, wyverns, sea-serpents, and men "whose heads do grow beneath their shoulders." Would you have me, who am only half an Englishman, forfeit my chance of acquaintance at first hand with realities so questionable?

In a few hours the doubt was decided. Evening came, and with it dinner in the Great Hall—a lonesome, drafty room, capable of feasting five hundred—and there, yes, at table, amid silver candelabra and with choice old Venice glass at my elbow, I could look as long as good manners would warrant at my two saints, or at either of them. You have my confession, Laura; make the most of it.

Perdoni, I have not said that I saw them thus on the Sunday evening. No such thing! You are caught, my dear girls; read more attentively. On the Sunday we dined in state, the Prince, his son, and their guest; but as in a monastery, without much talk, and by ourselves; neither did St. Cecily grace our banquet—which, by the way, had little to boast of except in its appointments. The dishes were few and simple. I would not give a bottle of Château Margaux for all the

Falernian that was ever drunk—it has neither flavor nor bouquet—and if Madame de Maintenon had been our hostess, she must have told more than one good story to help it down. I wondered how to approach the subject, delicate and dangerous in Southern ears, of the ladies of Roccaforte. Cautiously hovering on its edge, I talked of travelers' ways, the customs of nations, French salons and English freedom. Our girls, I insinuated, went where they pleased and did as they liked. Whereupon Miss Dalton sighs and holds up her hands in horror, with a vision of Amazons seated, after the manner of Britannia, on wheels, and flying before the wind. The minxes! Doubtless, my dear madam, *mais que voulez-vous?* It is the progress of science; you—I mean they—quicken your pace, shorten your skirts, and race to happiness. And so I chanted, but discreetly, the praises of a social order in which any woman, married or single, may dance, smoke, flirt, and join in philanthropic excursions with any man, and nothing said. Gaetano eyed the Prince, who listened as to the latest Marco Polo, just back from China, full of the barbarous practices he had witnessed or shared in. And then the younger man laughed—

“My aunt, Donna Anastagia, never saw these wheels; but what does she see except the saints in glory? And my sister, Donna Costanza, will never mount one. Yet they go where they like, and do what they please. Don't they, *padre mio?*”

“I wish they would come home to dine,” said the Prince. “Really, Don Antonio should persuade your sister that it is not her duty to be nursing fever patients in the village, at this time of night.”

“But he nurses them himself; and priests and women are all the same, *tutt' uno!* There should be a proverb, ‘Stiffnecked as a saint.’ Not true, Signor mio? Ah, in England you breed no saints. Well, I

revere them, but they are often a nuisance—to-night, for example!”

“Is there fever in the village? And does—the Prince’s daughter—turn nursing sister?” I inquired. In imagination, I was pursuing the luminous apparition shining into those filthy hovels—where an Englishman would not stable his horses—that shoulder and tumble against each other, frowsy, dark, and malodorous, in a mountain village among the Apennines. My glimpse of Roccaforte had disclosed an unspeakably foul street or two, as we turned from the lower piazza; and fifteen years’ absence did not suffice to quench the fumes of my unpleasant memories, when, as a boy, I had gone on voyages of discovery into Italian byways. Good heavens, if over all this fever hung like a cloud, into what an inferno had Donna Costanza gone down!

“Fever, fever,” said Gaetano indignantly, “there is always fever! I can’t blame my good aunt, and I adore my sister, if they both follow Don Antonio as ministering angels. They make amends for us”—with a look somewhat defiant and reproachful at the Prince, “who do nothing—ay, less than nothing,” he concluded bitterly.

“What can we do, my son, except show a little charity for God’s sake?” replied his father. “La febbre is a visitation. Pazienza!”

I watched Don Gaetano, when this panacea, dear to the Latin mind, for all the ills of life—and an excuse for not mending them—was uttered with the pious resignation that seemed to wrap it in a silver lining. Had not his father spoken it, I thought a flash from those eloquent eyes would have devoured it up. He was silent, however.

“What are the causes of la febbre in so pure and fine an air as Roccaforte?” was my question. “In Lombardy, I know, it is due to la pellagra, it comes

from eating unwholesome maize. Do they eat maize—gran turco—in these parts?"

"As much as they can get of it," answered my young friend gloomily. "The causes of fever in a village like ours—ours indeed! well, well—are hunger—first, second, and third, hunger—then damp, rags, long hours of work in malarious fields, and the contagion of crowded dens at night, where the family is huddled together for warmth and affection. Are you aware, Signor, that in nearly three thousand communes of this wasted land malaria is king? Malaria, deadly as in an African swamp. 'Italia la bella!' you tourists exclaim. I say, 'Italia la pestilente!' We live here on the brink of the Pontine Marshes; our peasants go down every day and toil a dozen hours in their killing vapors, which rise unseen but everlastingly into that divine sky of ours. Fever and famine, fever and famine; there is Italia la bella for you!"

"But is there no remedy? What is the Government doing? The nobles, again? Yourselves?"

Gaetano's brow darkened. "The Government is taxing life with its conscription, salt with its excise, corn with heavy duties, and not long ago with la macinata; it is paying out the nation's health and wealth to financiers of the house of Israel. The nobles are landlords with a chain round their necks. 'Latifundia perdidere Italiam'; you have read the sentence at school in Pliny, have you not? It is as true as ever it was; great estates with us mean famine and malaria. But how can the nobles help it? Reckon up the heirlooms they may not sell, the mortgages they have no means of paying off; then tell me what strength is left in them to fight against fever and death. Am I doing them wrong, father?" taking the old man's hand, which he kissed reverently.

"It is the will of God," said the Prince, crossing

himself. "But, Gaetano mio, send Ser Angelo with two or three of our people with lanterns to meet Donna Anastagia. The hour is late. I will not have Costanza stay out, as she did before, the whole night. Let Angelo say that I lay my commands upon her."

"I will go myself," answered the young man. "Ahime, these holy persons break all the commandments under pretense of the love of God. Signor Massitero, I am inconsolable at leaving you; no, you are too kind, I would not have you stir out; the air at this time is most dangerous. To-morrow night, will she, nill she, Donna Costanza shall meet you at dinner, and sing—faith, yes, she sings with the best of them—while you sit like a god and listen. I want her to resemble your English girls more and our good little nuns less. She is not for the convent, is she, father?"

"I desire my daughter to marry well," returned the Prince gravely. "Had I two daughters, one should be given to God. But I have only Costanza; I will give her to the man of my choice."

While he was speaking, I pursued in fancy the bright-haired apparition moving from one sick-bed to another, smoothing hot and feverish brows with tender hands, holding to parched lips a draught of life, the purple sky above her, and a halo traveling with her every step. The fever would not touch Costanza; she was already "a thing enskied and sainted." What did the Prince mean by talking of her marriage? Costanza, rapt into that flame which burned and did not consume, would never marry. Once more I say, Laura, had you seen the expression on her countenance as I saw it, you would think as I think.

CHAPTER VI

SICILIANS DANCING

THREE days fell into the gulf, slowly, silently—drops of rain that left no trace. I was in a dense solitude. The castle, rich in tapestries that I could not be at the pains of deciphering, and in wall-paintings reduced to smutches of gray or green, possessed no library, and was vacant of inhabitants in its once gorgeous rooms. I became a student of landscape, *faute de mieux*. The devout Costanza was invisible; the Prince and his son had their occupations which took them abroad every morning early; and Gaetano counseled me not to cross the enchanted threshold within which I was held a prisoner. "Let this affair die away first," he said. "Our peasants have the eyes of a lynx and the ears of a wizard; should they suspect anything, woe to the man they fix upon." I consented unwillingly; though once, as you know, I did escape into the open after that storm. But even my second-hand clothes might have betrayed me; and I had no others until we could order some in Rome.

"It strikes me," said Gaetano, on the Thursday following my arrival, "that we can furnish you with garments, not your own—*non sua poma*—in which to appear this evening, when you will meet my aunt and sister. My own wardrobe has nothing suitable. But to-day there has arrived the baggage of Signor

Hagedorn—Albaspina I call him instead of his guttural German name—who is coming next week with friends to make up a shooting-party. He is about your height and size. Will you try some of his things?"

"Who is Signor Hagedorn?" I inquired in turn. "Is he young or old? punctilious or easy-going? You know what they say in France about '*une querelle d'allemands*.' As I have one quarrel on my hands, I am loath to undertake a second."

"Hagedorn—Albaspina—is a man of sixty, rich, tranquil, and a philosopher. At least, he calls himself a philosopher; I call him a curiosity. The purchase of antiques is a mania with him; he was never married, is a tolerable shot, worships our family—we are antiques, I suppose—and comes whenever the fancy takes him. He will not quarrel with you, unless you carried in your pocket a medal of Didius Julianus. Ah then, *per Bacco*, your life would not be worth a sham bronze, such as they palm off on the Americans at Pompeii!"

"So that is his mania! Well, every one has what God sends him. I am safe from the plague of medal-hunting. But will Donna Costanza dine to-night? Has she done with nursing the fever?"

"How done? I believe she has some fresh patients. As I will not encourage her in this fine profession, I pretend not to hear what she says of her doings. But yes, she shall dine—and sing, did I not promise you? Sing likewise. Now, my dear prisoner, to your room. The lion is not seen by day. But, first, we will break into the trunks of Albaspina."

With the aid of Ser Angelo, and the indispensable native virtue of patience, we did so. Among his accoutrements, the philosopher had an unpretending suit of apparel, which would serve for morning and evening; I put off my Roman citizenship with the

stage-dress that Finocchio had bought for me in Giubbonari; and in my new disguise felt and looked such a different man that Gaetano could not help exclaiming, "Dio mio, you might now outface bandit and policeman; they would not know you. But keep in your den, I entreat. There was some confused talk last night in the village, Angelo tells me, about I know not what—brigands in a tussle with the pubblica sicurezza. It may be of no consequence; we shall see."

I heard no more of it, and thought as little, when we sat, a pleased company, at dinner, the two ladies doing the honors with a simplicity which was quite unlike the brilliant French manner, and as far as possible from our dear, dull, Sainte Nitouche Britannic fashion of entertaining strangers. Donna Anastagia, in some beautiful old lace and stately silk, took the head of the table. Her niece, in white muslin, I should call it, but Heaven knows—I was never a genius at sketching millinery—anyhow, glorious as an angel, radiant with a single red rose on her breast, and shining curls over this exquisite high dress, looked straight at me between the woodland creatures in silver that held up the lights, and talked without a shadow of embarrassment or prudery. Not that she talked much. Her disposition, I thought, was to be silent. But she had the prettiest expressions. I ventured to suppose her tired after three nights' watching by sick beds.

"Part of me is asleep," she said, turning her frank eyes toward me, "or perhaps I am in two places at once. I hear you lamenting over the terrible newness of the mosaics on the façade of San Marco, and I see myself at Venice again—we were there last year. I could even point out the figures, and feel sad, as you do, when the gold glitters so defiantly at us. Yet, all the while, I am with my sick, with poor old Candia and her husband, and that wicked Renzo."

"Is it Renzo that was brought up here yesterday at dusk?" inquired Gaetano.

"I imagine it," said Costanza; "the uncle, you know, has a quartan ague; and Candia—well, Candia is a vecchiarella, poor and old—"

"Candia is a strega—a witch," cries her brother. "If she stayed at home, instead of trafficking in amulets and keepsakes with all the girls and married women from Roccaforte to Circeo, she would have plenty of time to look after Pasquale. But she leaves him cold and frozen."

I felt a certain interest in the tale which Gaetano interrupted. "Who is Renzo?" I asked. "And why was he brought here yesterday?"

"Renzo is Candia's nephew," replied the Princess; "he is not one of our villagers."

"God be praised," threw in her brother, "he is capable of anything—una galera—a galley-slave."

"But his aunt has always been good to him," said the girl. "Yesterday two of his companions brought him between them up from I don't know where; he had lost his senses after being wounded—badly hurt he is. There was no place but Candia's to lay him in, though Pasquale had the bed."

"Did you hear nothing more of the circumstances, Signorina? How was he wounded?"

She smiled and looked grave. "I heard this tale and that; our peasants are attached to us, but they never let us know their secrets. When we began to bathe his wounds, my aunt and I, we found a bad contusion over the forehead; and there was a wound between the shoulders. But Renzo would not open his lips as long as we stayed. He will confess all to Candia, if he lives."

Don Gaetano was silent; his father had taken no part in the conversation, and I felt it must drop. Neverthe-

less, I put one more question. Trifling with my glass of Orvieto, I said to Donna Costanza, "But if this man is not of Roccaforte, what paese has the honor of him?"

"He belongs to Cartena—the village on the hillside which you can see from our windows."

I felt more uneasy than at any moment since I struck my villain down in the Via dei Serpenti. Was this Renzaccio? And had my bamboo inflicted a serious wound? Certainly I was not answerable for the cut between the shoulders; that, if it was my man, must have been the work of some one else. How could I make sure? Go into the village, see this Candia, and get a glimpse of the injured ruffian? That he was a gallows' bird I took to be evident. "Yes, it is my Renzaccio," I concluded in my own mind. "And now, will he die or live?"

Gaetano was teasing his sister to play and sing. She refused with a charming naïveté. "It is true I sing; and you say a beautiful voice gives pleasure; and I have it not for myself. But I feel that I ought to be doing penance. Why did I leave my sick this evening? There is only Candia to wait on those poor things. I cannot sing now, fratel mio. The Signor will pardon me."

"You will have to pull out all the stops—give the whole orchestra when Sismondo arrives next week," said her brother mischievously. "Won't you practise before he comes?"

Costanza laughed and looked merry. "Do I pay court to Sismondo—Marchese di Lucera, and all the rest—or does he pay court to me? Signor Albaspina has the finer ear; if I sing, it will be to him. And, of course, to our guest," with an open smile, singularly resembling her brother's. "Sismondo? But Sismondo is too much of an actor; he is a meridionale; he poses, struts about, strikes an attitude—so," and the girl threw herself into a statuesque posture, at which the Prince

and Gaetano laughed heartily. It was sudden and effective; one could see the man. But Donna Anastagia frowned—not very severely. “Ah cattiva, don’t mock,” she said. “Take off your husband when you are married, well and good. Before marriage, it is unlucky; you should not quarrel with your dinner before you eat it.”

“I would not touch Sismondo with my finger-tip, let alone with my teeth,” cried her niece, running up to the elder lady and kissing her. “Husband me no husband, Donna Anastagia, until I beg the signor padre to give me one at the Befana—for a Christmas box. Then you may forbid mocking.”

We were scattered now in the Great Hall, at unequal distances from the fire, which had been lit on this cold evening. Costanza moved restlessly to and fro, in a half-dancing humor, but could not be prevailed upon to seat herself at the piano, an instrument which I had not expected to see in the castle of the Sorelli. The night was sharp without being unpleasant. A moon, which was growing toward the full, made long swaths of brightness through the uncurtained windows looking into the cortile; and we were roaming backward and forward between the deep shades, when from outside the sound of a mandolin floated up, and voices broke on the stillness.

“We shall have music, after all, to spite you,” exclaimed Gaetano, leading his sister close to the window; “but who are these?”

Ser Angelo entered and spoke to the Prince. “A troop of poor Sicilians, Eccellenza,” was his report. “I allowed them to pass the gate. May they show their skill?”

The Duke turned to Donna Costanza with his lordly manner, as if enjoying the joke. “Either you or they, figlia mia; which shall it be?”

The girl made a feint of clapping her hands. "Sicilians, father? They, of course; who but they? Let them dance too, and act a comedy for us. But bring them in; it is freezing in the courtyard. Bring them in."

"Ah, Signorina," I said imploringly. "Don't call them up yet. See what a picture in the moonlight! They are dancing already; it will keep them warm enough. Do watch them as they turn and take one another round the waist, and beat time with their feet. They are model dancers."

We threw open a long window, about which our little group was standing in chiaroscuro, with the rays of moonlight touching a feature here and there; it was reflected from the diamonds of Donna Anastagia, and caught by the young girl's robes as in a perfect snow-storm, out of which her bright eyes and golden hair emerged with strange brilliancy. The dancers kept on dancing; the mandolin awoke a second and a third instrument as to innumerable echoes; and down into the deep cortile fell the fairy light, broken and uncertain where the buildings cast their shadows, but in the higher regions victorious and still. Faces went and came; hands were lifted, clasped, untwined; the dancing figures multiplied themselves and quickened their steps; and always the mandolins interpreted their movements with a ripple, and a chant, and a laugh, and a sigh, never quite serious, but questioning slyly and whispering maliciously, and once in a way striking the most sullen note they could shake from their fantastic dreams, in which all was play and merriment. Such a torrent of words flowed along with them as the lutes babbled and chattered, ringing out metallically and then melting into soft cadences that, unless one were an adept in Sicilian, it would have been hopeless to understand them; but love-making has much the same tones in all languages,

and this was their subject, expounded in swift pantomime.

"No, indeed, they will not freeze—your dancing musicians," I said to Donna Costanza. "But they may catch a chill when they have finished their pirouetting."

"True, true," she replied; "father, tell them they must come indoors. The hall is large enough to be a theater. Call them up." She made him a charming little courtesy, which seemed to take her inside the dance that was still going on below. The music, I thought, had leaped into her blood.

Orders were given, the great doors thrown apart; the servants of the house came in; and as we took our seats in anticipation, a sound of tramping feet was heard on the stone staircase, and in rushed a motley array of men and women, picturesque enough in their parti-colored rags, who shuffled about to find places at the lower end of the hall, where the moonlight was streaming. Our silence and the peculiar and uncanny light seemed to scare the intruders. They shrank together as if terrified. But a small, dark man, in a red jacket and a Tyrolese hat, who had taken the part of conductor in the revels outside, now came forward, and with many cringing reverences asked the Duke's pleasure. He turned, as for an answer, to Donna Costanza.

"Ah," she said laughingly, "what must they play, now we have caught them? Come, let them give us one of their island dances—a ballad of action; something that shall taste of Sicily, like its own honey."

Don Gaetano spoke to the man in red, who reflected for a moment.

"I have it, Eccellenza," he said, smiling and exhibiting a double range of white teeth. "We will give you 'Beppuccio il valente' ('Brave young Joe'), and therein, please God, you shall admire a few steps of the *virtulidda* and the *capona*. Don't fear; they are beautiful

dances—most beautiful!” holding up both hands in ecstasy. “And I will explain to your lordships without delay what the ballad means in your good Italian.”

We encouraged Red Jacket to proceed.

“Behold then, Signori Principi! It is a festa in the Conca d’Oro, at lovely Palermo. The lads have money in their pockets, plenty of the flying and the ringing, carta volante, danaro sonante; and they go to drink good old wine at the new tavern, under the spreading boughs—red wine, a carlino a flask. Who are the boys? Why, of course, Beppuccio, Cicco, Andrea, Tonio, and the others. Many a glass is wiped. But Beppuccio is the best by far; drinks like a malandrino, save the mark; and then they divert themselves with morra and gaming, with the dance and the chitarra. But, ahime! young blood is soon hot; they can’t agree; they begin to show their teeth; some one knocks over the candles, and out come knives and flash in the dark. Santo Diavolone, how they fight! Zazzà! he that dies, dies; and who is dead then? Bring a torch! Ah, villains, they ’re off. Lights here! See Beppuccio the unlucky, the lad of honor, lying dead with seven stabs in him. But the traitors—fled! Not a man caught. Beppo is carried home, a corpse. Thus it ends, a lovely ballad, signori illustrissimi; Sicilian to the knife-blade.”

Our scarlet prompter concludes with a ringing laugh and a bow, and turns on his heel. In a second the mandolins are alive; two sonatori step forward, strike up, and commence the recitative. Meanwhile the others, men and women, take their positions, hum the lines between their teeth, and give us in pantomimic action every syllable their choragus has uttered, and a world besides. They push into the taverna nova; demand the best liquor and no end of it; touch glasses, embrace, and tumble into a sort of jig, with caperings

most ludicrous. Then the women drop into the background; the men gamble, scream, spring into the air; knives are out, Beppuccio is on the floor; the rest scamper away.

So inimitable a rehearsing was all this of the scene I had witnessed at Ranieri's that, if I could believe the devil has any humor (which I do not), the suspicion might have occurred to me that some facetious ape out of hell was playing on my uneasy conscience, with a phantasmagoria well adapted to the occasion. As for the audience, first it sat quiet, and then was wrought up to an enthusiasm in which it went fairly mad along with the actors. Even Donna Anastagia laughed and cried. I watched her young companion; and though Donna Costanza did not lose control over her features, I could tell that she was inwardly amused by the frequent trembling of her lower lip. Certainly it was wonderful acting. The room in which we sat became, as by magic, the new tavern, with its drinking, dancing, and Beppuccio lying stabbed in the sawdust. But something still more wonderful was to happen now.

For, all at once, without warning, we heard the sullen stroke of a bell. It was so natural, so much a part of the play, that we gazed round upon one another, as if inquiring who had done it. There could be no mistake.

The bell, which had given forth a solemn note and then ceased, began tolling again. At that unearthly summons the company of actors, startled even more than the rest of us had been, broke and dispersed. The mandolins fell silent with a shriek. We could hear a tumultuous rushing downstairs and a struggle at the entrance. Springing to the window, I beheld the Sicilians coursing like deer in the moonlight, over the courtyard and through the castle gates. They were vanished into night, into space. But the bell kept up its death-striking monologue; and I dreaded the next

words that must fall from the lips of Donna Costanza. Too well I knew what they would be.

Listening in the attitude of one counting the strokes, but without betraying signs of alarm, she said to her brother in a feeling undertone, "Oh, why did you keep me here to-night? It is Renzo's passing bell. I am sure of it."

"You think Renzo is dead?" I asked, subduing my voice to hers.

"It can be no other," she replied. "He was at death's door this afternoon."

And I said to myself, between rage and compassion, "Am I then his murderer?"

What had I done? What had befallen me, to whom the shedding even of guilty blood was not only inhuman, but a crime? That last blow, into which I threw the weight of passion as I struck, lay heavy on my soul. To-morrow would reveal whether it had proved fatal to him—and to me.

CHAPTER VII

REQUIEM ÆTERNAM

I SLEPT; but my sleep was troubled. An oppressive burden lay upon me in visions which had no more coherence than a number of half-finished designs flung into a heap, yet the burden did not shift or lessen, and when I was fully awake in the still hour of dawn, I felt bruised in all my limbs, weary, and disconsolate. The bell was tolling. "Heavens!" I said to myself, "has it never stopped? Or am I suffering from hallucinations?" I dressed and hurried into the courtyard, where I found Ser Angelo making his way toward the stables.

"Why does the bell keep ringing?" I asked him, in a voice that sounded hollow to my ear.

"It is the Requiem Mass for old Candia's nephew that died last night," he answered, with a gesture of unconcern. "Santiddio, he will be in want of one! They should be praying for him at Cartena. Why do they cast their dirty water at our door?"

"I should like to watch the funeral," said I, after thinking in vain how to beguile the story of Renzo's death from him. "When will it be? Your customs are different from ours in the North."

Angelo looked under his eyebrows at me. "It should be this evening, at the Ave Maria. But will your Excellence be pleased to rub shoulders with a crowd? For I doubt not many will be there, neighbors

and kinsfolk, from Cartena and all round. Renzo had a great reputation; moreover, if as they say he was wounded to death, the people will flock to have a sight of him. I pity the man that did it. The Corsicans are not worse devils than the Cartenesi."

"They will revenge it, you think?"

"Revenge, Signor! Trust them for that. I have stood by when a brother and a wife dipped their fingers in the blood of the murdered man, and licked them—the tigers—in token of vendetta. Renzo leaves wife and children; and there is Nonna Candia (old mother Candia), she never forgives, and knows more than is good for her. Ah, yes, I pity the assassin."

"He is certainly to be pitied. However, Signor Angelo, supposing I strolled down an hour or so before the Ave, would the crowd be so pressing? It is a curious spectacle, which I am anxious not to miss."

"If Don Gaetano were to go with you, all would be well, Ser Inglese. You might even see the body laid out at Candia's. I know the Principessa will be there to comfort her."

I felt in greater need of comfort, all that lugubrious day, than the wise woman who bore a classical name redolent of Horace and Paganism, and who, as rumor would have it, pursued the good old trade of witchcraft up in these hills. That Renzaccio and her nephew were not two, but one, a growing conviction, or sense of obscure fatality, was burning into my brain. I stood on trial in a court where I was judge and jury, agitated but inexorable: and the evening would unfold against me evidence, the strength of which I foresaw with shuddering. I had killed a man—a villain, doubtless, and in self-defense, and from the best of motives. It mattered not; this right hand had slain him. I could not bear to look at it. An impulse which I made it a point of honor to resist prompted

me again and again to rinse my fingers in cold water. That physical disgust which returned like a sickness I could not wholly overcome. There were two men in me—the culprit waking sulkily out of his slumbers, the judge standing severe above him. I was a puzzle to myself; I began to be a horror.

Don Gaetano had gone out shooting. He came back at the last moment, as I was preparing to move, and excused himself quietly, with a gracious phrase or two, and a far-off look in his eyes. He bore all the marks of fatigue. Would I allow him to beg off, and take Ser Angelo as my guide instead of him? Certainly; but while I answered, my observation, straying over his features, could make nothing of the reserved eyes and firm-set lips. Was he angry? Did he suspect, absolve, or condemn? I must endeavor to find out by and by.

“The crowd is here,” whispered Ser Angelo, when we had arrived, under a threatening sky, on the edge of that bleak little piazza, with its barn of a church, its ugly stone fountain, and its few sordid shops, or rather dens, behind whose half-opened doors a miscellaneous assortment of small wares was visible. The clink of the blacksmith’s hammer made itself heard, in spite of a movement and a din such as angry bees stir up on a day of swarming. All the rags in Christendom appeared to have furnished their quota to the greasy, unwashed garments of the men, some of whom were clothed in sheepskins and might have been sylvan monsters, let loose from the chestnut groves around; nor did the women display much that was neat or handsome, though they flaunted staring red, yellow, and blue in profusion, and some ancient gold and silver jewelry. All alike moved on high wooden sandals, with an awkward gait reminding me of children on

stilts. They were not beautiful people, being—to speak the honest truth—weather-tanned, long-featured, muscular, uncouth, and desperately foul. I had called Renzaccio a satyr; well might these be his cousins male and female—the remnant of hill-tribes dating from immemorial antiquity, who had sat on their heights watching the stream of history pass by, but never bathed in its waters—or in any other.

The day had turned to rain, with flying showers and a cold east wind. In the sky were long streamers of cloud, showing blue between them and silvery edges; but it was a cold prospect, under which these dreary houses, and the crowd at their base, made a picture, mean no less than repulsive. The very rain, as it fell, seemed hideous and dirty. But rain or no rain, every minute yielded a fresh accession to the crowd. With Angelo guiding me, I turned into the steep and horrible byway—which Kafirs, I dare say, would have kept more free from unspeakable pollutions—and went up to a rude stone hovel built close into the rock, on the threshold of which a masculine-looking hag, with bare head and hair in disorder, was yelling out directions to some half-naked children as filthy as herself.

“Ecco la Candia,” said the steward. “Donna Costanza will have gone in.”

“Into that cellar?” I inquired with astonishment; for it seemed rather an opening in the massive limestone rock—a cavern faced with rough masonry—than a human dwelling.

“That is where the people live,” he answered; “there Renzo is laid out. Good evening, la madre! This gentleman from the castle has heard of Renzo’s misfortune; he would like to see him.”

Candia threw back her wind-swept locks, and turned sharply on me two sunken eyes, in which red lightning gleamed. She could not possibly know who I was:

my borrowed plumes made me a very different bird from the visitant of the trattoria, even if Renzo had described him to his aunt. Accordingly, I made no scruple of looking her fixedly in the face without saying a word. Our eyes met. No sooner had they done so than, to my surprise and—yes, solemn as the occasion was I must confess it—to my amusement, her bony fingers stole down to her side, and she pointed with them toward the ground. Candia was “making the horns” against me. She had seen in my prolonged stare the jettatura; I had the evil eye.

This encounter of enemies did not last many seconds; but it was enough to open the way before me. “The Signor is welcome to come in where my poor little nephew is lying,” Candia began with a simper, which disfigured her wrinkled features more than a deadly grin—features so amazingly fierce, so ancient, dusty, and leathern, that no imagination could feign they had ever been attractive. But the simper vanished in a cry which rose from her shaking throat, “Let him count the wounds too, and guess the assassin! Devil choke him with the clotted blood, whoever he may be!”

At that sudden outburst, Donna Costanza came from the filthy den. “Nonna, Nonna, it is the will of God,” she whispered in her sweet voice, putting her arm round the neck of the Fury. “Patience, mia cara; do not curse, do not blaspheme. God will have pardoned your Renzo.”

She was already beckoning me to enter. “He is in there,” she said. “Tread gently, and do not wake Pasquale, the husband—he is asleep after the troubles of yesterday.”

Candia stood aside, still making the horns, as we passed her. I felt a thrill of repugnance at the step I was now compelled to take; yet the next minutes would bring the certitude which was easier to bear than

suspense. The roof was low, the rafters blackened with age and smoke; a small, square window without glass in either of the two dungeon-like rooms that made all the cottage gave such light as the autumnal day could afford. We crept by the sleeping Pasquale, Donna Costanza preceding us with a church taper, blessed at Candlemas, burning in her hand, which, as we drew near the long table, she held aloft, throwing a faint ray upon what was stretched out there waiting for burial. I shut my eyes by an involuntary movement, but with a sense of cowardice. But I must see my doom. Snatching the taper, I took one stride to the bier, and looked down on the dead face. Ah, now I knew! It was Renzaccio.

I held the light close, in silence, stooping to get a nearer view of the shaggy head and the long, lantern jaws, which I remembered as clearly as a portrait-painter might have done, who had been many days learning their lines by heart. The hair and beard were now decently trimmed; the face looked strangely peaceful; it bore no mark of violence. Forcing myself to do so calmly, I lifted a tuft of the still matted locks from off the forehead, where a red streak peeped out; and I had the impression of a severe scalp wound underneath my fingers. Should I draw them back crimson? No, they were unstained, except in my mind's eye, which beheld them dabbled in blood.

"You spoke of another wound," I whispered to Donna Costanza.

"Eccola!" she returned, in as low an accent, "on the crown of the head. Dr. Mirtillo says it was that which killed him, rather than the cut between the shoulders. It brought on tetanus, he believes. But no one will say how or where it was received."

"Tetanus—lockjaw—did he die of that?"

"Of exhaustion rather; but lockjaw set in. I

thought he would not speak to us yesterday. It appears that he could not."

"He could not—he could not—Principessa," screamed the old woman at the top of her voice. And when Costanza motioned her to be still, "Ah, let me alone with Pasquale. He will wake?—let him wake. Why should he be sleeping when I am up since yesterday, and my darling nipotino massacred? Speak? No, indeed, neither to you, nor to me, his unhappy aunt, nor to that angel, Don Antonio. For he is an angel! Here he knelt, one hour, two hours, praying, talking to my Renzo, beseeching him for one little sign, only to press his hand, for his soul's sake. The poverino was tongue-tied. He rolled his eyes in agony, wanting to speak, to tell the name of the assassin. But never; before midnight he was gone."

She sobbed, and tore at her disorderly fell of hair in a wild paroxysm. It was with difficulty, by coaxing and threatening, that Donna Costanza kept her from doing herself some mischief. Pasquale slept on. "He never liked Renzo," she exclaimed suddenly; "behold how he sleeps, the bestiaccia!"

"You don't know the assassin," remarked Ser Angelo, who had followed us in, "but you do know the companions that laid Renzo at your door; is it not true?"

"I know them, signor steward? They lie that say so. The poor lad was brought in the moonlight, by three or four men, so I am told—men with masks on their faces; the children saw them carrying Renzo, saw them pitch him down like a bundle of canes at this door, e via! Off with them! I heard the heavy fall, ran out, and took him up as you see him. Madonna mia, he is dead, the best boy that ever lived, that I nursed and fondled! I was better than a mother to him."

"Which of the boys told you that tale?" asked Angelo once more, calmly.

"Eh, many were playing about. Doro Quaglia and Giovanni Greco told me; inquire of them."

I had been long enough contemplating the still features, in whose tranquility I suspected a menace, now that Renzo could never more take up his own quarrel. Died and made no sign! I should have to question those boys. Meanwhile, aware of the universal custom in life as in death among the unabashed Southerners, I left an alms in the witch's talons with some insignificant muttering, and turning to the Princess besought her that she would not stay longer in that plague-stricken hole.

"It is my place," she answered cheerfully, "my place; have no fear for me. When the funeral is gone, I must console the poverella; but I shall still be in time at the castle. A rivederci!"

There was no more to be said. We left the house, and pushing our way again through the crowded piazza, the steward and I managed to secure a conspicuous position on the steps of San Romito. The church doors were now flung wide open; within, at the farther end, six tall candles were burning above the altar, in front of which stood an erection draped in red, known as the catafalque. Sacristans hurried about, lighting other candles in the magnificent oak stalls, glossy and shining, dark as ebony. But the building was deserted for the square, although a fine, small rain had begun to descend, and umbrellas, vast and parti-colored, were now lifted on high, transforming the multitude to a regiment under dirty canvas. The cracked bell overhead persevered in its doleful recitative. But there was a hum of conversation on every side, with jokes and even cracklings of laughter; the whole scene was much more like a fair on a wet afternoon than the funeral of a murdered man.

Still, these were notable doings. How came Renzo,

a peasant, to have about him the trappings of a noble death? I inquired of Ser Angelo; but he, in one significant word, explained it. "Donna Costanza," said the steward. It was her charity that lit the tall candles, and prepared the church for a solemn dirge and funeral. Her hand, I thought to myself, was somehow clasped in mine to make this ceremony.

The bell tolled; the people chattered; and into the square came a long procession of specters, clad in white dominoes, through which the eyes shone ghastly. They walked in double file, and carried hideous yellow torches, from which the wax dropped incessantly, while bare-legged children ran by them, holding paper cornets to catch these "tears" as they fell. The dead man followed on his bright crimson bier, looking with upturned, open face to the pitying heavens; and behind him moved, without much order, and quite without dignity, an irregular line of clerics, also bearing torches, chanting an interminable nasal monotone as they came slouching along. The crowd was now suffocating in the small piazza; nor could the funeral make its way without eddying rushes and commotions, as of a lake in violent tempest, and some feeble cries here and there of people thrown down. The excitement of those near the body, pressing in as it passed, gaping to catch sight of the wounds, was communicated as by magnetism to those at a distance. Upon the moaning Miserere came in a whirlwind the greater human cry; it was taken up; it was repeated from end to end of the piazza; it seemed to strike along the steps where I was standing, to bellow into the church and be flung out again, hollow upon the wind. The houses all round caught it and gave it back. The infection, spreading in a wave, seized me uncontrollably, and I too sobbed aloud with the multitude.

A terrible emotion seemed to spring at my throat.

I stood alone, facing the crowd, whose lament for murder and witness against it rose into the clouds. But they were accusing me—me, in the presence of the victim; me, at the foot of the altar. It was I who had done this thing. Had I not disguised myself? acted the innocent spy? stirred up Renzo and Carluccio to their fatal game of cards? But for me this procession of white ghosts, chanting and sobbing, would not now be advancing to the gates before which I had taken my stand, as though daring to welcome it. The roar of voices fell upon me like a hot breath. I was stifled; and thrusting fiercely to get from under the feet of the mounting men, at that moment I seemed to recognize in one of them who touched me as he went by (the pale domino serving him for a shroud) the air and gait of Tiberio Sforza.

If so it was, he did not know me; at all events, he followed into the church where the people now came flocking, and I saw him no more. I went with the stream. Renzo was taken beneath the high catafalques; the clerics, in black and white, filed into their stalls. Don Antonio, in a sable vestment, stood between the bier and the altar, with attendants, holy water, and a flaming censer. What seemed a brief, animated dialogue ensued, the priest reciting, the choir answering; and ever, while the gloom of evening deepened, the yellow torches gave out their murky light. One touch alone was needed to finish this tragedy with a sublime stroke. I had but to rush forward, throw myself at the knees of Don Antonio, and confess my guilt. A mad imagination; yet I came near acting it. The torches, flickering on that motionless countenance, lent it the expression of life. I could have sworn the lips were parted in speech; but if so, the tones lost themselves in the chanting of the alternate choirs. Two figures in black had stationed themselves before the

altar, and there broke forth into loud psalmody. The stalls took it up. A continual shifting of the ranks went on in the body of the church, until every one, down to the youngest child, had put his hand upon Renzo's corpse, from curiosity the most part, I suppose, but others to clear themselves of the suspicion of murder, and others—of that I was certain—to register vengeance. Among these last, it would not have surprised me to observe Tiberio Sforza. But either I was deceived or he had taken his departure when the dirge began. If it was indeed Tiberio, how came he at Roccaforte, and in what relation did he stand to Renzaccio? That was henceforth a new element, where all seemed strange.

After an interval I resume. I have been talking with Don Antonio. The funeral is over, and my crime—if crime it is to be called—lies deep in the grave where Renzo sleeps, under a line of cypresses, on the side of Roccaforte. In that neighborhood, which drew me like a magnet, I was walking to and fro, about sunset on the next afternoon. I could look down here over the vineyards, among which the whole population seemed busy in the grape-gathering. On this natural terrace, the dark spires of the mourning-trees just below me, I met the paroco, deep in meditation, his beautiful, aged face bent earthward and his steps uncertain. Was he too thinking of the death or murder which for me hung the heavens with black? We paused, saluted, and fell into conversation.

Don Antonio Frezzolini—but no one gives him his full name—speaks a choice Italian, with trills and sudden melodies—an old man's treble; his shortest phrases have music in them. And the long line of pure crimson in the western sky; the distances faint with a pearly tinge, iridescent but immovable; the intense

green of vineyards, autumnal grass, and reed-like canes; the animation under those large leaves, the laughter and petulance and sport among a people who were turning work to holiday, singing as they plucked the clusters down between rows of trellises, awakened in me some forgotten chords of the antique and the classic world. Where was the Lord of the Vintage, Bacchus, crowned with his own spoils, the ivy-leaf on his brow and a fawn-skin about him? I saw the girls stop in their pretty task to dance like young kids; the children leaped and chased one another, and crunched the grapes, and were driven out with shouts of glee, to come back roguishly peeping round corners, and snatch up a fallen branch, and be hunted into the olive-gardens, where they clung about the trees in a sort of playful comradeship. The Bacchantes were yet on the hills and down in the glade, joyous and youthful as the vines which they were stripping. But I saw no Bacchus; and near at hand, preaching on their eternal text, the hateful cypresses towered—black, tapering flames, steadfast and windless, torches in the grasp of death.

“The poor youth did not speak after he was taken to Candia’s,” said Don Antonio. “God forgive his murderer! Bad enough to be cut down at eight-and-twenty! but to deprive him of speech so suddenly that he could not make his confession! Ah, world, world! A bad world, Signor caro!”

“Yet you buried him with a grand Christian service, Don Antonio. Was he not a reprobate and a cut-throat?—food for the galleys, I have heard.”

“Who knows but he repented, though his tongue would not tell me so? I think he understood me. When I took his hand he pressed mine with a hard grip; his eyes lighted as soon as I whispered my name. When I said the act of contrition in his ear I am sure

he went along with me. At all events, I gave him absolution," said the mild priest, with a pleading look in his eyes, almost as if he deprecated my harsh judgment on a step so hazardous.

"Renzaccio got his pardon cheap," I exclaimed, as we reached the end of the terrace, where the cemetery gates yawned upon rusty hinges and half-rotten timbers. An enormous crucifix had been set up outside it, gaunt and haggard, with the storm-beaten Christ nailed to its rude beams, and the ladder, sponge, and spear of Longinus completing the story. Don Antonio lifted his three-cornered hat.

"A cheap pardon, did you say, caro Signor? I do not think so. Look there! It was this one—questo qui—that paid for it. Ah, Gesù mio, how many ages hast Thou hung upon the Cross, and men pass by and regard not!"

I felt abashed; the argument which was on my lips died away. A third, whom I was not minding, had come into our discussion, and I could not answer Him. But still, "Do you make no difference between the just and the unjust, Signor paroco?" I asked, when we turned away from the divine yet all too human symbol. "This Renzo is said to have killed his fellow-creature—" and there my tongue faltered. I stole an uneasy glance at the hand that hung down by my side—my own hand, the blood upon which, invisible to others, was visible day and night to me.

"Who am I to judge men?" answered Don Antonio. "I am a priest; my judgment is mercy. If Renzo knew me, and in that pressure of the hand truly repented, though his sins were as scarlet, He that looks down upon us there would make them whiter than snow. Credis hoc? Dost thou believe this?" He ended with a smile of infinite tenderness, trembling a little, so earnest was he to convince me.

"That is a strange application of the Sorelli motto," I answered, lost in my own thoughts. "A world-wide application! *Sangue lava sangue!* And so, padre mio, had I committed murder—were I a brigand, as they say Renzo was, and many corpses lay on my threshold—I should have but to throw myself at your feet, confess, and be forgiven?"

In fancy I was doing what my language figured. The old man remarked an emotion beyond his interpreting in my voice.

"Surely, if you repented, there would be pardon. I say *He* paid the price—a great ransom."

"And human justice—the law—the magistrate?"

"The law does not concern me; I sit at the mercy-seat in Christ's name, and the guilty and the broken-hearted come to me. I hold the keys, not the sword."

"Yes, Don Antonio," exclaimed a ringing voice behind us, "but the law *should* concern you. I am Dr. Mirtillo," said the newcomer to me, lifting his hat. "I observed you at the funeral yesterday. On this subject I quarrel with our gentle paroco. He is all for mercy. I am of opinion that a little hanging or heading, in the style of Sisto Quinto, is wanted up here."

The doctor laughed rather loudly, as if he had confidence in my agreeing with him. He was a dark-featured man of good height, rapid and energetic in his movements, and showed a singular alertness of expression.

"That is my man—Sisto Quinto," he continued, "no nonsense about him; none of your enlightenment, your jury-system, your indulgence for thieves, bandits, and assassins! You won't call me a Liberal, Don Antonio, now, will you? Per Giove, were that splendid old Capuchin alive, how he would make fun of our abolition of the penalty of death! See what it does for us! Renzo Fava kills as many as he can stab in

the back; and somebody else, unknown, kills him. Why didn't you hang him as soon as he was caught, I say? Then three or four others would be still eating their polenta, and be no worse off than he is this blessed afternoon."

The priest had moved away, and was standing by the crucifix in prayer.

"Tell me about Renzo," I said to Dr. Mirtillo. "Why do you speak of him as a murderer?"

"Perche? Ah, why, indeed!" with a laugh which was almost a sneer at my innocence. "Come a little to the left, Signor—a little more still, so; you remark that agreeable paese—that big village near the summit of yonder hill? Delightful scenery, soft climate, sheltered from the sea, with this vale of Paradise at our feet. Eh bene, the village is Cartena. And Cartena is a nest of robbers, highwaymen, cutthroats at command, men-thieves and women-thieves—the devil's own seat from five centuries ago. In Italy we murder at a rate which appals your English sang-froid. But Cartena appals even us. For every ten men we kill elsewhere, this astonishing Cartena kills fifty-seven. For every thirty-four we strike with a knife—our favorite weapon—Cartena strikes two hundred and five. For every three highway robberies, Cartena will supply you with one hundred and thirteen. Is it enough? I could go far, on so smooth a road; however, now you will grant that Renzaccio, as a genuine son of Cartena, could do no less than rob and murder."

"The village, I take it, is poor; they must rob in order to eat."

"Poor, yes, but not so poor. Roccaforte eats less and has less. The Cartenesi are little landholders; every man rents or owns a bit of vineyard, olive-yard, or what not; he will have his herd of goats, his donkey,

his coins buried or hidden. It is not poverty, Signor, it is breed. Cartena sows and reaps its brigands as Tuscany grows Chianti, by natural process. Renzo had a mother from this paese—old Candia's sister, of whom he that speaks nothing says most in her praise. But his father came of a truly accursed stock. For generations they have played the same game; all thieves, and out with their knives to finish la povera gente. Good blood does n't lie, you know."

"You say Renzo was condemned to prison. What for?"

"What but an assassination? However, don't suppose the jury of brothers and cousins would bring in their dear kinsman guilty. At Cartena convictions never take place. There is no evidence. How should there be? If I were fool enough to appear before the tribunal over there against one of the citizens, to-morrow or the day after you would stumble on my corpse with a rope round its neck. Affectionate attention! No, Renzaccio—he well deserved the name!—was tried in Rome, found guilty—though not even there of murder, only of stabbing, so please you—and sent to the Isola del Giglio in the Tuscan Sea, where he committed another murder and escaped—as scores of them do—some months ago. We have n't seen him in this country of late. I suppose he was in hiding. Now he lies there. And I say, look what comes of abolishing Nature's penalty against murder. The law abdicates; then some unholy wretch steps in to execute judgment, when the public authorities fold their arms."

"Well, how would you proceed to reform Cartena? By education? By religion?"

"Pope Paul IV—a stern old man—gave free leave and license in 1557 to every one who would to kill the inhabitants of that 'nest of sad thieves,' as he called it, and to pull the castle down. I am not Paul IV. My

plan, however, is thorough. I would take the inhabitants from their high dwelling, divide them into families, emigrate the less criminal to South America, put the rest to forced labor in unhealthy regions, and if any man dealt in murder I would strike off his head after a trial which was not by jury. Till Cartena is forcibly evacuated, the tribe of Renzo will not cease."

"Then you think he deserved his fate?"

"Decidedly; but not at the hands of another brigand. The law should bear the sword; whereas, in this thrice unfortunate country, bad government has combined with sentiment, and superstition with cowardice, to let the guilty escape. We condone murder when we treat the assassin indulgently. I am sick of an enlightenment which leaves Cartena standing."

I had one more question. "Will the police make an investigation into the circumstances of Renzo Fava's death? He was buried, I thought, rather hastily."

The doctor shrugged his shoulders. "They may. I gave my certificate on which they can act if they please. No one knows—that is to say, not a living soul will tell—who brought Renzo here, and how he came to be stabbed. He was struck first with some obtuse weapon, I believe. An escaped convict dies; it is a good riddance. What have the police to say in it? But Cartena will remember; and, if possible, will revenge."

CHAPTER VIII

IN A GLASS DARKLY

A PICTURE of the castle taken by storm, captured and feasted in, by a joyous company of young men from *il Regno*—the late Kingdom of Naples—from Roman palaces and villas on the slopes of Frascati and Albano. To this, which was an interior equal in brilliancy and magic movement to the finest painted ceilings at Venice, add an outdoor piece, if possible yet more akin to Veronese—I mean a hunting-scene down in the marshes, not far from where hill and plain meet in a tangle of thickets, and where you shall see the fox chased with dog, horse, and man. What share did I take in these entertainments? Listen!

I was in buoyant spirits again. That dialogue, in which doctor and priest came to my relief, did almost persuade me that I had ridded the world of a nuisance, and even sent a soul to purgatory—and what better could the villain expect?—when I, in short, you understand! Anyhow, the thing was done. “*Cosa fatta capo ha*,” said the wicked Florentine, not Machiavel, but Mosca, whom the poet saw low down in the ninth circle. Should I now go back to Rome, follow up Tiberio, satisfy my curiosity in regard to his dealings with the dead convict? Yes, when I had observed Gaetano in council among his Guelfs. Nowhere else, he assured me, could I study the rising shoots of these

great old families more at my leisure. The gloomy episode of Renzaccio's death seemed quite to have passed from his mind. Don Orazio seconded this welcome invitation; and though Costanza, naturally, said never a word, yet I was vain enough to hope that a longer stay might win me a little of her confidence. On what grounds? Well, once in an evening, when I talked eagerly—you know my way—of the new life and its conditions, how much might be done by pure human kindness, she would fix her bright eyes on me, and sometimes put a question to her brother. Nay, thought Arden, she shall question me by and by what men and women were doing to live that life in England.

The "princes orgulous"—never did epithet clip men more closely—had filled the stables of Roccaforte with their horses and dogs, the rooms with their attendants, and the whole castle, from courtyard to battlements, with shouting, singing, thrumming on the mandolin, acting one half the day and talking loud politics the rest of it. Italians have no nerves; Neapolitans are the noisiest people in Europe; and I never could see much difference between the manners of the nobles and those of their servants, when excitement got the upper hand. But a Neapolitan is nothing if not excited. He lives in a universe of gestures, screams, runnings, tumults, and theatrical bustle. In all which exasperating accomplishments find me a rival to Sismondo, Marchese di Lucera.

It was at the close of a long dinner. The Great Hall sparkled with lights, old silver, mirrors worthy of the Palace of Truth, a hundred tints of silks, brocades, velvets—for ladies were among the guests—while burnished coats of mail were disposed as trophies in spots where their reflections would be multiplied. We had dispersed ourselves hither and thither in flowing groups;

and a musical storm of conversation rolled its waves, the whole world in motion. Every one was talking his best, or repeating in dumb show the sentences addressed to him; with eyes alone you could have made out the argument of this amazing comedy.

In an embrasure between two windows, I stood and watched it. Pure and splendid Veronese, I repeat.

"How intense a life is running over at these eyes and lips!" I remarked to Herr Hagedorn, who, like myself, had taken refuge from the flood among statues and trophies.

"It is the old Greek pantomime," he said, "of which we possess a marble replica, not quite perfect, in our museums. If the figures came to life that is how they would act. We have nothing whatever like it among Germans; neither have you English. In one word, it is *la plastique*!"

"Does it amuse you, as it amuses me? It is as good as a play."

"Far better; these Southerners live the play; they are never more serious and seldom more excited. A lighted match would explode them."

Hagedorn had been told, very slightly, of my adventure; and the plundering of his portmanteau made us friends. Like your interesting correspondent, Laura, he was tall and thin; but his gray hairs denoted wisdom, and his gold-rimmed spectacles the spirit of observation. He had read libraries, explored continents, eaten of every cuisine from Teheran to Trouville, and made an unmatchable collection of antiques; but he had refrained from marrying, and now sat in the best box at the opera, enjoying other men's follies while they sang bass or tenor, and were deluded by the reigning diva. His own diva, he used to say a little grimly, was the tenth Muse. He called her *Locusta*. Why that name? I will explain it, if I dare, when we

have done with the Marchese Sismondo, who now came toward us with a lofty stride and arms extended.

"Ha, ha, my philosopher, you are nourishing the spleen with *Ser Inglese*," he cried in his stage voice. "But let me embrace you for the charming sketch of Naples you have given in '*La Revue Bleue*.' Not more than Naples should claim; *cospetto*, less—a thousand times less! However, beautiful and true. No, you will not be embraced? Ah, men of the North, you are ice without sugar; you have no more sentiment than a chilly snake!"

I fixed my gaze on the large, curly-haired, yellow-skinned young man whom Hagedorn had waved off with a smile. He wore a profusion of rings, and a double gold chain over his waistcoat, with a bundle of charms in coral and ivory attached to it. My intention was harmless, my look not more serious than usual. But, instantly, as his black orbs met mine, I detected the downward motion of the hand, fingers thrust out, and, lo! the horns which Nonna Candia had directed against me. The jettatura once more! A mad fit of laughter seized me, which I endeavored to control by turning away to the window. When I turned again the Marchese was smiling all over his too plastic features. Be you assured, Laura, my sudden madness appeared to him the doing of his horns. So, he would have argued, does a witch turn and rend herself inwardly when she is running in the form of a hare and the dogs are upon her.

But I knew a way to daunt my Neapolitan. Looking him straight in the eyes, and then directing my malocchio down toward his watch-chain, I said, as if considering, "Marchese, you wear some pretty amulets, I see—quite a number, too—the horn, of course, the horseshoe, the crescent-moon, and the open hand, *mano pantea*. You are well provided against the—"

"Hush, hush! my good Englishman," broke in Hagedorn, who had remarked the uneasy flush mounting on Lucera's sallow cheeks. "Our friend here," he continued, turning to the Marchese, "does not know that some things are never talked of in Italy, though every one has them in mind. Pardon him."

"Oh, no," I said lightly, "there is no need of pardon. I wished merely to observe that of all the charms against—you know what—*Excellenza* does not appear to carry about with him the mightiest."

"Which is that, pray?" asked Lucera with a sneer, but disquieted.

"You don't know? Astonishing! Why, the *cimaruta*—the sprig of rue—to be sure."

"*La cimaruta!*" exclaimed he, triumphantly, "but behold it; I carry it always in my waistcoat pocket."

He drew forth and held up to view the potent sign, on which, nothing abashed, I concentrated my malignant gaze. A curious little thing it was. Figure to yourself, my dear Laura—and, by the way, bear with me if I fall more and more into the Italian idiom, hearing it and talking it every moment, nay, dreaming in it too—figure to yourself, I repeat, a tiny silver spray, like the end of a stalactite, four branches on one side of the stem, five on the other, and each of these little sprigs terminating in some grotesque object—a key, or a half-moon, or the hand "making the fig," of which last you remember our reading in Dante. Such is the *cimaruta*—powerful as holy rue itself, when alive and green, to blunt the spells of wizards, necromancers, secret enemies, and all the wiles of Satan whenever he attempts his unholy working through human agents who have made over to him their souls. The thing, as I kept looking on it, seemed to me peculiar and unpleasant. I should have thought the devil was in this silver monstrosity with its pointing hands, rather than

likely to be subdued by its influence. It had an expression at once fiendish and artificial—a kind of murderous blindness. I don't know how to convey the sense of horror which it inspired except by this unintelligible phrase. But have you never, in walking through a large house alone, or, it may be, in rummaging out old and forgotten curiosities, felt that there was something—not some one—a presence, yet not exactly a mind or a person—close to you, that meant and would inflict mischief? Had Lucera offered me that piece of silver rue, what do you suppose I should have done with it? At the earliest opportunity I would have crunched it under the heel of my boot. Ah, not he, indeed! He showed it me gaily, turned it hither and thither in the light, caressed its horrid finger-tips, and said with an ironical smile, "If the cimaruta were only alive! These nine branches would soon finish off a necromancer!"

"And you wear them against *il fascino*?" I inquired, in a voice as stern as I could make it. The word struck him full in the breast; it was a thunder-clap.

"Eh, il — What did you say?" he ejaculated; and before I could answer he was half across the room. I felt, and I suppose my looks betrayed me, that I had routed the Marchese di Lucera, horse and foot. The German philosopher at my side was not of the same opinion. He seemed hesitating whether to speak.

"You, too, Signor Albasina, put faith in *il fascino*?" I said, lowering my voice. "Why do you bend your brows on me with so tragic an air? Is *la jettatura* one of the things dreamed of in your philosophy?"

"How very wild—how strangely incautious—you English are when you come abroad," was his reply. "You have thrown Lucera into a deadly fright. Should the least accident befall him—his horse cast a shoe, or himself be taken with a bleeding at the nose—

he will swear you did it with your bold blasphemies. After which, if he invites you to hunt or shoot in the forest round his ancestral crags, I advise you to decline. A Calabrian peasant, knowing you were a jettatore, would put a bullet into you at the first chance."

"But am I the—the dreadful thing you say? Look into my eyes, Herr Philosopher. Do you perceive this diabolic effluence there?"

Hagedorn's face was a study. "They say in the village—at least old Candia says—your eyes are dangerous. My dear young man, don't play with fire. Candia herself is a strega of the purest descent—her mother and grandmother plied the trade—and she, as they say in the fish-market at Naples, is a Jannara, one of Hecate's own company. I wish, by the by, she could be coaxed into selling me her coral necklace, with the medals of Diana Trigemina, which by some extraordinary luck she has been able to string upon it. No, Signor, do not laugh at the malocchio. Remember among what people you have fallen. Lucera is as full of superstition as an egg is of meat. Cross him with your pretended fascination, and he will certainly aim at your life."

"He appears to be making love now, not war," I answered, indicating an absurd little scene which was enacted, chiefly on his part, but for the benefit of Donna Costanza, not many yards away.

The girl was seated in a tall, high-backed chair, beneath an immense battle-piece that stretched along the wall. A Roman lady, the Contessa Vespignani, leaned over, whispering earnestly in her ear, and both seemed busy with their conversation. But Lucera, putting on the air of unconcerned buffoonery, which is the most characteristic of Italian traits, moved lightly round them, serenading in dumb show, with his fingers

on a fictitious mandolin, and a spirit in his heels of repressed dancing, most comical to behold.

Donna Costanza went on talking to her friend; but it was impossible to keep serious, and, I thought, a little more of the fun would have drawn her into answering it as gaily as it was thrown up at her imaginary windows.

"These fellows can do nothing but act," I said to Hagedorn, with a spice of pettishness. "Do just look at that Figaro! Yes, it is graceful, I don't deny, but surely effeminate! Donna Costanza is the better man of the two, with her square Roman forehead and decided chin."

"It is always so in times of decadence," replied the German. "In this country women have character and men have beauty. Not that Costanza is not beautiful. But she has the face of an innocent boy, frank and unconscious."

"I understand she is to marry Lucera. What do you think?"

"Her father wishes it. In nine cases out of ten that would be equivalent to saying it was done. But Costanza may prove the tenth case. Bravissima, my dear girl! You see she has had enough of the cavaliere servente and his guitar. She puts him aside with a touch of her tongue; it can be sharp, I tell you. Ah, but how cleverly the serenader thrusts his instrument, which is pure imagination, under a cloak that never existed, and glides away, heartbroken! Could the false Sir Proteus have done his serenading more admirably beneath Sylvia's window that night—that night? Why don't you speak, Signor Ardente?" For I had lost myself in certain idle thoughts.

"She is going, Ser Alaspina! As early as this? Why should she go?"

I did not care a spangle on Harlequin's jacket for

Lucera, Sir Proteus, or any serenader that ever caught a chill on dark nights thrum-thrumming before a lattice, and therefore I had answered in these words which were so little to the purpose.

"Why should she not?" he replied. "Can you fancy she takes a pleasure in this Fierucola—this Vanity Fair—with its chatter and jingle? I know what she has in mind. Shall we follow? Say the word, and we slip out quietly."

I said nothing, but made for the door. "Not that way," whispered the German, leading me up the hall to a side issue that opened on a winding staircase. "Come with me, and keep a still tongue in your head."

We passed through, and began to twist and turn in the dark, he going before, as familiar with the place, while I stumbled after, once or twice giving my head a smart rap against the projecting masonry. At length when we had got, so far as I could conjecture, nearly as high as the battlements, Hagedorn unfastened a door, through which a feeble light broke upon us. He motioned me to come forward. I did so, and found myself in the chapel where I had seen Costanza for the first time.

A couple of lamps burning, one on each side of the altar, accounted for the purple glow that softened the shadows. Ghostly faces, limbs, or vestments shot into sight unexpectedly from the paintings around, flickered, and went out again, aimlessly, as in a world where no man came. The high roof was darkness; and we, a little nervous, dreading lest we should start some timbers creaking, moved on until we stood secure in the gloom, away from the betraying lamps. I was on the point of saying, "But we are alone," when a door opened at the farther end, letting in Donna Costanza, as I knew by her brilliant white dress of satin.

She did not see us; I doubt if she would have seen us, though we stood close to her. The girl came up to the verge of the holy place, and there kneeling, with her eyes directed to the altar, she stretched out her arms in the form of a cross, and remained motionless. We did not dare to breathe. Minutes passed; the silence was unbroken, the kneeling figure in its dazzling raiment did not stir. A great calm—as when the sword-like tramontana drives every cloud from heaven, and leaves only the blue without fleck or stain—seemed to fall even upon us, the spectators; we felt that a soul was laying itself bare to some uncomprehended influence. From my place in the dusk I watched, knowing, or at least suspecting, that a marvel would be wrought, such as I had witnessed one other time. And it was so. The light was breaking out from within; the eyes kindled, the forehead seemed to grow whiter, the golden hair gleamed. But still, no motion in the hands stretched upon an unseen crucifix, no voice, not even the breathing, convulsed or caught up, which I thought must be the accompaniment of a rapture so intense. How long would it last?

Long, long, as we measured the moments, vibrating to the strange experience of another soul, responding in ourselves to unknown chords. Then the figure was bowed even to the ground; Costanza lay prostrate before the altar, not as fainting, but in some unspeakable mood of dedication, while the trembling light hovered upon the fair hair and the blanched, angelic raiment. Above was darkness in the high roof, and round about only this quivering ruby glow which, quite unconscious, did its own service in presence of the sacrament, whosoever went or came.

Costanza stood up at last, her flush deepening, and drawing back a few steps with joined hands, she lifted her eyes toward the altar once more, and then her voice

broke into song. Utterly amazed, I strained my hearing to lay hold of the words. It was a Latin hymn, fragments of which I remembered in the Holy-Week service at St. John Lateran, but now chanted so distinctly, with such a passionate fervor in each syllable, that soon I could follow as on an open page. I knew it to be the moving, quaint "Pange Lingua" of the Passion, which I had once heard, sung by alternate choirs on Good Friday, while an immense throng went up the Basilica and knelt in adoration of the Cross, kissing the wounds of Christ with sobbing, which the singers took up and made glorious. Costanza, under cloud of night, whispering these cadences, sucking sweetness out of this honeycomb, brought that singular and never-to-be-forgotten lamentation back to me, with its thousands of mournful faces. She had an extreme purity of tone; but the richness given to it by a consuming solitary spirit, wasting in the flame it had kindled—who shall paint?

Over and over again Costanza sang the strophes of the hymn—a line, a phrase, appearing to thrill and enchant her. "Dulce lignum, dulces clavos"—sweet wood of the Cross, sweet nails that pierced—these words made the refrain of her unearthly song. But when, after all, she was going out from that mystic place, where she deemed herself alone, and had come to the door, I watched as childlike and pretty a farewell to it as you ever saw. Inserted in the wall hard by was a Pietà—the dead Christ lying on His mother's knees—in white marble. It shone with a peculiar glory amid the somber shades of the chapel. When Costanza came to it, she stooped, and with the most confiding gesture laid her brow first on the stretched out right hand, then on the left, in exquisite pity and as asking a benediction. But even that was not enough; standing reluctant, and looking back, she

passed her own hand gently over the hands of Jesus, and conveyed it to her lips with a touch of infinite tenderness. Nothing could be more natural, and, I confess, it melted me.

Hagedorn, after a while, motioned that we should go now. Instead of descending the way we had come up, he led me by a loftier flight of steps, and we emerged on a broad, flat roof behind the castle parapets. "We will delay here," he said. "What think you of this starlit landscape?"

"I am thinking of Donna Costanza. Did you know?—of course you did, else we should not be here at this moment. What an amazing, what a beautiful creature! Is she quite—? She speaks with sense and judgment, too."

The German moved round inside the battlements, compelling me to follow, until we had gained a position from which, under the restless pulsing of the stars—there was no moon—we caught a glimpse of the sea-line, as it were an edge of glittering steel among low clouds. The shapes of mountains on either side gave one an impression, or rather, weighed upon the mind, as if they were something preterhuman, to which one had not the key—something from another world, alien and strange to us. The winds were quiet.

"And so it is not hysteria?" I resumed, questioning myself as much as Hagedorn. "Tell me," I went on abruptly—speaking in English, a language that my companion had thoroughly mastered—"do you believe that in such states there is any *real* experience? Are they feeling and no more?"

"If the sun were above the horizon," returned Hagedorn, "the stars which you now see would be invisible. Under their faint light you discern those waters, afar off indeed, but surely it is the Mediterranean. When a pure soul like Costanza turns from the light

of common day, as your poet expresses himself, to the stars and the sea couching beneath, it is soul, or spirit, that answers. We are fools, we moderns, that prattle of dead Nature. There is no death. I mean that life is around, above, on all sides. It is there to take of it as much as we will. Costanza plunges into the sea and it bears her up."

"At any rate, your Goethe would canonize her as a *schöne Seele*; a St. Agnes, some one else would say, the bride of the Spirit. Will she have gone down now to endure the coxcombries of the Marchese Sismondo?"

"Not if there is a fever-patient in Roccaforte. They tell me she saw the last of that unspeakable ruffian, Candia's nephew, who was murdered in an affray with the police. Oh, I have often watched her unawares up in the chapel. I am an old friend of the family, you know. I have heard her sing as you did; nay, when she was a child I have seen her dance, too, in a perfect rapture of joy, before the Madonna delle Grazie. You must not think her melancholy. She delights in flowers—a rare taste among Italians, most of whom dislike their scent; and I remember how, on a brilliant morning in March, she has plucked a branch full of almond-blossom, and run upstairs with it to the chapel, laying it on the altar and crying, 'Gesù mio, the spring is here; see, I have brought you the first blossoms. Are they not sweet, Gesù mio!' Oh dear no, not hysteria! Poetry, religion—or better still, faith, by which faculty, as I understand it, we draw music from otherwise silent strings. I do not believe Costanza ever did an unkind or a foolish thing in her life. She is worth a thousand of Sismondo. And, mark my words, she will not marry him."

With this comfortable assurance, I was fain to quit the cold stars, and join the Neapolitan Fair down be-

low. Costanza had left her father's guests to their noisy diversions, which included a sham tómbola where everybody lost, and more serious gaming than I had ever seen in society. The Marchese won and lost with equal animation. But, to my secret joy, he lost especially when I was looking over his shoulder. After a run of ill-luck, I noticed that he turned half round to stare at me, and then deliberately pulled out his sprig of rue and laid it on the green table.

"It is time you saw these curious ear-rings of mine from Clazomenæ," said Hagedorn, taking me firmly by the wrist and leading me to the other end of the room. I was in a mischievous humor. "Mensch, Mensch, verspötte nicht den Teufel," he exclaimed, striking me warningly on the breast. "Why will you provoke the fellow? He has lost a thousand lire, and you are the cause, with your mocking eye. For Heaven's sake, be careful. Have you no enemies, that you can afford to manufacture them?"

"I want him to lose Donna Costanza," was all I could bring myself to say. "If the malocchio can do that, I will stare at him as long as he stays in Roccaforte."

My German philosopher put back the case into his pocket which contained his precious ear-rings, felt my pulse with all a physician's gravity, and then, with a countenance from which every sign of playfulness had vanished, said in my ear, "If you, my friend, have fallen in love with Donna Costanza, I prophesy two things—she will not marry you any more than Sismondo. But, unlike Sismondo, *you* will never get over it."

CHAPTER IX

A HUNTING-PIECE

WELL, Laura, how do you like my first sketch à la Veronese? You make that charming little face I have called up so often, sunshine on the lips under a severe and thoughtful forehead. What, have I flung Correggio's golden brush at the scene? brought out butterfly Amoretti, loves and doves, in the embroidery thereof and thickened it with a deceptive haze? But really, you know, Hagedorn was a mere raven, croaking fatalities. Had I felt in such a way toward Donna Costanza, should I now be writing it to the female recluses of Marinden? Go to—I am not so unacquainted with human, and especially feminine, nature. I praise this wonderful young person chiefly, Laura, because she is never going to marry—at all events, not Sismondo di Lucera. And so, and so, you are satisfied?

Now for my second attempt at the unparalleled Venetian. But always bear in mind how absurd it is to quarrel with Italy, setting it down as artificial, stage-struck, and a worn-out piece of the opera, just because it cannot help being like its own pictures. I have observed sunsets off the North Foreland that you would have said were a shameless plagiarism of Turner. And in the Pontine Marshes we were all, on a certain clear-faced morning, resolved to act our bit of Veronese

—cavaliers, dogs, and, I suppose, the boar as well. At dawn a heavy tempest of rain and wind swept up with the sun from the Eastern Apennines, making the sky an enormous purple cloak, slashed by and by with a thousand seams of varying color, hung on the edges with diamonds which broke out into rainbows, as the cloak traveled and its fringes waved before the lagging Apollo. It was like a flight and a battle at last, in which the god chased the cloud with arrows of lightning. Then the mid-spaces grew transparent; a wide interval, serene as a crystal floor, appeared in heaven; and we were hurrying down on horseback, in highest animation, to the casino below, some three miles off, where the meet had been arranged.

Over the soft ground it was easy going. "The scent will lie thick to-day," said Gaetano, who in his dark, green hunting-suit, and managing his horse to perfection, looked what he was, the lord of the chase. I saw no man the least his equal, assuredly not the Marchese di Lucera, for all his decorations on sleeve and collar, which, among ourselves, would have been thought in bad taste. But my young hero of Roccaforte was at the head of a brilliant gathering. The country around sent its youth from a dozen castles; there were ladies to see us throw off, though none would be riding to hounds in this rough exercise. Even the perpetual blowing of horns, discordant close at hand, nor ever meant to be musical by the natives, who delight in brayings of all kinds for their own sweet sake—added life and stirred the blood which was already tingling. And the fox-hounds bayed, the horses champed and stamped, the young men exchanged loud greetings as they rode hither and thither to ask who had come. On our left was the shining water, unutterably fresh and matutinal, as if in bathing the stars it had caught some of their brightness. The woods above, on the

hillsides, dashed now into a million tints of autumn, with long processions of green-headed pines circling them in a dance that had no end, made a foil most effective to the emerald-green lush and tufted grass, with its clumps of brushwood scattered in all directions, that more than half concealed the deep ravines and treacherous quaking mosses, over which our morning's adventure might take us.

We did not make a start so soon as I expected. The Duke of Sila was late, and until he came the hunt lingered. Hagedorn, bringing up his powerful though rather heavy steed near mine, began, as his way was, to point out the strangers and describe their habits, for my benefit. I could not but admire the good looks, and the amiable manner, which fitted them to take their place in the mental sketch I was contemplating. He agreed. "Nevertheless," he went on, "much as you are pleased with their pretty faces and their picturesque trappings, you should know that their brains are sawdust; nay, if you put them at the head of a cavalry charge, it is doubtful whether they would bear down a line of the worst Austrian infantry that ever was drawn up. I don't call them effeminate. That would be too ridiculous, would n't it, now as you see them? But they want grit."

"They are full of fire—straining to get away," I said. "In this temper they would charge cannon."

"If it were three hundred yards off, yes. Put it half a league off, I doubt."

"They will be charging soon," I returned; "here, evidently, is the Duke of Sila."

Up rode the great man with his company; the dogs were uncoupled; the sport began. Our first cover we drew blank. Then we tried toward the mountains, edging away from the sea. We went almost under the thick woods, over a very uneven ground, the dogs

pressing on eagerly, yet by no means fast, puzzled by the scent which lay thick before their noses. I began to doubt whether, in spite of the favorable sky and wind, we should get a good run. Our company began to halt and scatter. Suddenly Gaetano shouted; an immense clamor went up into the sky; and down came, tumbling over himself in hot haste, a young cub out of the high woods, the dogs within a dozen yards of him, and not three minutes' breath of life, it seemed, in the animal. Away he tore into the comparatively open plain, making for the brush that invited him as the nearest refuge; and you may depend on it, the hunt was at his heels. Gaetano passed me, shouting, "He is a cub; the hounds will be breathed. They should let him go."

But not they, and not we. The waiting had been too much. We wanted excitement and a sharp run. I can tell you we had both. As for the hounds, they quickened their pace mightily, stamped along through the high grass, yelled with rage, and were maddened as the scent rose, provoking them. Master cub had seen his chance, and took it with a keen determination. He ran more like a thing that had wings than a young quadruped; but he was in his first youth, life was sweet, and the brush looked impenetrable to his enemies. He ran, we ran, the dogs went at their swiftest; Gaetano and the more experienced were carried away by our impetuosity, and we all now found ourselves in headlong flight, conscious of the changing sky overhead, the waving and fleeting woods, the din that rose, the quarry that rushed, a dream of motion, in which every heart-beat was a thrill of joy. How mad it all was! and how mere a drunkenness of physical pleasure!

For twenty minutes, I should say, we tore along in this whirlwind, horses and dogs at the top of their speed, and then, panting, ashamed, confounded, with

heads down, tongues out, foam on their muzzles, the wretched hounds had to give up the game. Their young demon of a beast was too much for them. He had got to cover, and there lay snug, amid a dense wilderness of brush and pools of bluish-gray water, hopeless to find or attack. Our beloved Gaetano was gnawing his lip, and throwing a fiery word at the whippers-in, who should have known better than let us steal away after this fashion. But the huntsman had marked his company. He knew we were spoiling for a run, and he reckoned the day was still before us.

"The dogs will find the right quarry now, Signor Principe," said the old man cheerfully; "non, abbia paura. We will soon make a fresh start."

Impatient as we were to open the second chapter while our blood was warm, we had to wait. This time, Don Gaetano took matters in hand. Again we stirred up from his sleep a lively cub, but the Prince was to the front in a moment, and held the pack in. By this the sun had mounted; a slight strip of cloud hung doubtful above the sea; the air had grown sultry for November. Our next run would be more leisurely than the last. We had now turned toward the desolate-looking village of San Giuliano, an ugly country for horsemanship, but a paradise for the descendants of the Laurentian boar that still wander in its low and tangled brakes. Ah, now we shall move; the dogs have found; an old inhabitant, no question, for see, Gaetano lets them go at him. There is sport in prospect.

Nevertheless, our new friend did not scurry along with the speed of his young cousin, who was now regarding the chase from beneath some twisted and prickly screen. He knew the country well; but so did Gaetano; and when he headed down the wind—a manœuver which brought us nearer the sea-coast again

—some four of us were riding pretty close to him at the tail of the hounds—the Prince, Sismondo, Hagedorn, and myself. Now I never did care, I never shall care, to be in at the death. I can get drunk with the pleasure of galloping after a phantom, but I am not the wild huntsman that must bring down his game—only the dreamer to whom rapid motion through the air is inspiration and joy. What was that panting red animal to me? During the next ten minutes, however, he was the world and all to Gaetano. The German had fallen back; I was taking no heed of Sismondo, whom an undulation in the rough brambly hillocks was delaying behind us, when I saw the Prince leaping his horse at a low wall in front, and then there was a crash. I followed him over the fence instantly a few paces lower down, found myself on the edge of a morass, and my friend motionless under the weight of his fallen steed. He had miscalculated the distance, and nearly tumbled into the water.

Dismounting, I ran up to him, caught the reins in which he was tangled, and with a certain British phlegm, invaluable at that moment, was able to get the horse on his feet without damaging the rider. Gaetano had fallen into a dense clump of reeds, and thus undoubtedly had saved his life. It took him some little time to get free of them. I was standing near, the bridle of his quivering horse in one hand, while I endeavored to help him up with the other, when from over the wall a bullet whizzed by me, tearing my coat-sleeve and grazing the left arm. A few inches more one way, it would have gone through my heart.

I cannot describe to you how quickly all this happened. In the confusion neither Gaetano nor myself was capable of observing who had ridden up behind us, nor, of course, did we know what sportsmen of another kind might be stalking the marshy plains over which

the boar was leading us. With silent questionings we looked into one another's eyes, and then across the slight erection where we had come to grief, in the hope of making some discovery. Our men were now all advancing as fast as the nature of the ground would permit. The hounds had rushed on ahead; but those who had perceived Gaetano standing, with me by his side, naturally halted to make inquiries. We soon had a little crowd around us.

"There is blood dripping from your arm, mio caro," said the Prince affectionately; "you have taken a hurt, and, per Bacco, you have saved my life. I should never but for you have got from under my Rosinante. How, in the devil's name, did I mistake the distance? Come, let me bind up that wound."

He was tearing his handkerchief into strips, and began to bind my arm; but there was a shade of perplexity in his looks.

"You are pale, Ser Ardente," he continued; "you must not faint," and he was for putting his hunter's flask to my lips. I declined with a gesture.

"Are n't you hurt as well, Principe?" I said, pulling myself together.

He laughed. "Not a scratch. I should have been, had you not come up. Remember, I owe you my life."

That was a pleasant hearing. I thought more of it than of my strange hurt, which those who had ridden from a distance explained to themselves by my having fallen when I leaped the wall. And, indeed, the sudden whizzing past me of a bullet, which could be traced to no one in the vicinity, might have seemed an idle dream, born of excitement and delusion. Who could have fired it? Gaetano put that question to me in a low voice when we had mounted again, and, leaving the hunt, which he would not allow me to follow, were turning our horses' heads in the direction of Roccaforte.

There was but one answer possible—the accommodating national phrase, “Chi lo sa?”

We two, however, did, by a silent compact, go down into the hollow from which the shot came, and explore right and left, though to no purpose. We made inquiries of one or two contadini, but they assured us that no sportsmen except ourselves had been seen in the neighborhood that day. Gaetano’s countenance fell. He seemed to be searching in the recesses of his mind for an explanation.

“Let us go home,” I said at last; “my wound smarts a little. Think it an accident, Signor Principe, and that the unlucky man was ashamed to confess his awkward handling.”

“It may be so, Ardente,” said the Prince; “and look,” he added suddenly, “from this day you and I are more than friends. You said, ‘Let us go home.’ Understand, then, the Rocca is your home while there is a Sorelli to guard it. You agree?”

I grasped his hand firmly.

“But, for all that,” he continued, “I do not believe the shot was accidental.”

“No?” I said, in a mood between fear and hope; “have you any suspicions?”

It was uncharitable, I dare say, but had one name escaped his lips I could not have been sorry. The Prince shook his head. “I can’t fix on any one,” he answered; “all I know is that you have put yourself in danger before coming to Roccaforte; that in Italy murder has a thousand eyes and weapons always ready; and that the stroke which kills is usually unsuspected.”

These words set me thinking; they appeared so reasonable that I dismissed the unlikely charge against Lucera, which I had been shaping in my own mind. I preferred an old apprehension to a new one. Still, I could not be sure. As we were entering the courtyard

of the castle, in fact, that same afternoon, in company with our guests returning from the chase, I overheard Sismondo talking in his loud fashion to the Duke of Sila. "And yet some folks are not afraid of the evil eye!" said he, snarling.

"Eh, te faccio na fica," answered the laughing Duke, and he made the well-known gesture. "Heaven keep it from you and me. But who was looking at Gaetano when his horse fell with him?"

"Who, indeed?" returned the Marchese, his eyes scintillating with the strangest passion. "I suppose he that aims at the boar has been planted there by the huntsman; what do I know?"

He knew nothing, the envious fool, I said to myself. For the Duke and Costanza, who had been told of Gaetano's accident, were embracing him, and giving me a world of thanks and insisting that Dr. Mirtillo should see to my arm immediately. As for Costanza, with a charming expression of gratitude, she gave me her hand.

"You saved Gaetano, and you belong to us. Life for life—is it not so, caro padre? Tell Signor Ardente that he belongs to us."

"We, rather, to him," said the old man, graciously. "And you are wounded, my dear friend? Who has gone for Dr. Mirtillo?" looking round on his people.

I made some incoherent answer. But as for the physician, no, I would not see him. I protested that there was no occasion. Gaetano appeared anxious, but undecided. Hagedorn, who could wear a mask of impenetrable German dulness when he pleased, and who perhaps knew, though he would never tell, whence the mysterious shot proceeded, now came to the rescue. "Quite right, Ser Inglese," he said, "you have lost some blood; you don't want to lose more. The Italian surgery is not yet emancipated altogether from the barber's basin."

"Exactly," I answered; "if you, Signor Albaspina, will do the doctoring, I shall feel that I am in good hands. Come with me to my room."

But I was taking to myself in silence the words that Costanza had spoken, "A life for a life." Perhaps I had not done much for Gaetano after all; yet I counted on them as an absolution, so that I was merely amused when Hagedorn, helping to bandage my arm, said to me, "Have you no belief in the malocchio after this morning's adventure?"

"None at all," said I; "but there is something I did not believe when I came to this old castle which I believe now."

He looked at me inquiringly. "Well, what is your new article of faith?"

"I believe in the crimson motto of the Sorelli, 'Sangue lava sangue.'"

"It is the law of life," said Hagedorn.

Thus I came by my hurt, Laura. And now I end this long story, which I have thrown into chapters, by way of brightening it up, and send from the Monti Lepini before I turn my back on them. Shall I ever see Roccaforte again?

BOOK II
IN THE UNDER-WORLD

CHAPTER X

LORDS OF MISRULE

I AM within the walls of Rome. I have seen and conversed with Tiberio Sforza. But how shall I speak of our interview? It has shaken me like an earthquake. Dare I write it down? Some deep feeling which I cannot master warns me not to leave it unrecorded—a presentiment hangs about me that one day it will perhaps stand me in stead. Nevertheless, I shrink and hesitate. Will the very letters in which I write turn scarlet under my pen, while I endeavor to trace the features of this enigmatic, forbidding, and yet seductive Italian—the latest birth of a monstrous time? What ought I to do?

Thus far, I had had no scruple in sending these fragments of a diary to Marinden; since, however clearly they make me answerable for Renzaccio's untimely end, they prove that it was on my part chance-medley, the accident of an encounter in which I was not to blame. It is true that I cannot bear to think of my stained hands. I am always invoking the pure and tender memories of Gaetano, of Costanza, in which, as in a miraculous fountain, to bathe my over-sensitive conscience. But what is this to the bloody dawn that, all of a sudden, has flushed from nadir to zenith, has polluted and brought down the sky over my head, one awful cloud of murder? I seem, at a single stride, to

have passed beyond humanity. Not as doing, but as knowing; almost as an eavesdropper—at any rate as a father confessor, who should find himself burdened with a secret which made him henceforth strange among his fellows. Write that to Laura I never can. But brood over it in silence, walk and talk and sleep with it as a specter at my side, that is just as impossible. I will trust it to these pages, and hide them in my little room at Finocchio's, where no one enters but Giovanni. Measuring his terror by my own, I am assured that if he did but see this prologue to what follows, he would read not a line further. I am safe with him. It is my own thoughts of which I cherish reluctantly the greatest fear. . . .

Let me recall how it was. The hunting-party had broken up—Sismondo, my possible assassin, the last to leave, and Hagedorn, knapsack over his shoulder, starting on some classic-antiquarian tour in the upper Apennines, intent, as always, upon making friends among the contadini and snapping from them unconsidered trifles, for which benevolent project winter is the season. I left under a promise to come again soon. Costanza had put off her reserve, except that she never, in my hearing, alluded to religious subjects; but she was gay, direct, and I had almost written sisterly, in conversation with me. Her brother told me much of his hopes and fears for the regeneration of Italy; but no more of that. Hardly do I know where we stand in this blinding storm. No, no—I will not, I must not, suspect the whole world. Gaetano is chivalrous, frank, and daring, not a conspirator, but the soul of an heroic age, born too late among a people he is incapable of guiding. He is Dante exiled from Florence, but loving, not hating it. I will think of Gaetano as Dante, austere, yet tender-hearted, with a rhythmic chant in him that makes his being music.

The stern fortress of the Rocca sent me from it in this mood, vaguely content, vaguely hopeful.

I pass over Giovanni's welcome on seeing me again. He is really attaching and attachable. But he cried, "Signor, tell me not where you have been. Oh, if I had but swallowed three grains of say-next-to-nothing, you would never have flown through the air like a sorcerer, and left me to look for a needle in the hay. Basta, basta. Behold you once more, thanks to the Madonna and Sant' Antonio."

"Why Sant' Antonio, my dear man? I was not aware that he took an interest in me."

"Sant' Antonio, if you pray to him, and I did, will find you anything you have lost — if it has not been stolen. With thieves and brigands Sant' Antonio — honest man — has no commerce. Ecco!"

"Well, thanks be, then, to Sant' Antonio. But, now I am back in Rome, my errand remains to do. I have particular good reason to meet Tiberio Sforza. No use acting the innocent, Giovanni. Tell me where he lives — not the trattoria Ranieri — else I will advertise and give this house for reference."

I spoke decidedly, once and not twice, waiting till the flood of eloquence was dry, which he poured out in answer. "Dunque, non volete?" I said, as though we were bargaining. A glance at my face convinced him that I was serious.

"Sì, Signore, voglio bene," he replied, trembling and uncomfortable. "But this time," he went on, "Sant' Antonio will not restore Vossignoria, if you are lost."

"You mean to say Tiberio is a brigand?"

He made an immense gesture, "I wash my hands of it. What can I more? Tiberio lives in the Palazzo Mocenni, third piano. He calls himself something else now."

Giovanni whispered a name which, for fear of acci-

dents, I shall not put down here. And there is no Palazzo Mocenni—I have altered the original; neither do I mean to indicate the quarter of the city in which Tiberio had taken up his abode. “I will go alone,” was my last word to Finocchio; “should I not come back, pray to your Sant’ Antonio, but don’t advertise for me. This time I decline to be troubled with a disguise.”

The days passed which I had resolved to spend in taking a general view of the city. And then yesterday forenoon I walked up to Monte Pincio, meditating awhile in its lonely paths, pausing before the busts on their pedestals of celebrated Italians, which I always find fresh and inspiring. My design was to tune these mixed, tumultuous emotions of mine in a key of simple courage. The white domino that had brushed by me on the steps of San Romito, if it were Sforza, might prove formidable. In London we had struck up an acquaintance, not very warm on my side, but of the sort which commits a man some degrees beyond his intention. We were certain to meet in a place so confined as Rome, with its set promenades, public drives, and frequent spectacles. After all, why should we not? I turned my steps toward the Palazzo Mocenni, ascended to the third piano, and rang the bell.

A lad, who appeared to be no more than thirteen or fourteen, with an excessively fair face and yellow curls, answered it. He took my card in silence when I had asked whether Tiberio was within, and ran off to some inner apartment. Almost immediately, I heard a firm foot on the carpeted floor; I caught sight of an Oriental dressing-gown, and a flute-like voice bade me step over the threshold. Aye, Tiberio Sforza—the man himself; I was in his rooms and could study him at leisure.

What struck me first was the change that had passed over his appearance. He had surely stepped down out

of a golden cloud. His dress in London had been shabby, not to say mean; his lodgings, where I never had visited him, were in one of the poor streets frequented by Italians between Leicester and Soho squares. That in those days money was not flush with Tiberio or his comrades might be gathered from a variety of tokens; nay, it was our common poverty which drew us into a laughing fellowship; we were the black-coated proletarians whom society insisted on starving as a sacrifice to respectability—that goddess grave and grim. But in these sumptuous rooms, with their parade of marbles and magnificence, *quantum mutatus!* Our dull worm had put on wings of dazzling luster—he was all eyes and jewels. Eyes that pierced me through and through, in a mask that never changed its terrible pallor. But the tones had their caressing softness.

“*Sia il benvenuto*, my dear Arden,” he cried, grasping my hand; “take a chair and feel at home. *Ascanio*, luncheon! You are just in time. How did you find me?”

I had reflected on the way of the game. *He* might finesse; but in dealing with Italians, as with Easterns, whom they so strongly resemble, there is one rule for us Transalpines—frankness. I answered, therefore, as we sat looking at each other, “Oh, easily enough—*Finocchio*.”

“Ah, *Finocchio*,” said he, “to be sure. And does *Finocchio* tell everybody that I have come into an estate and taken its name?”

“Not quite,” I answered, in a slight pique: “I made him tell me. You remember in London we had our confidences, which went no further.”

“Yes, I remember that well. And so—but please join me in my modest *colazione*—and so, you would like a little more confidence? Why not? It is all in a good cause.”

I accepted his invitation. But the meal was hardly so modest as he implied. Small, tasty dishes, rare French wines, of which we drank sparingly, and afterward cigarettes which no government had patented. Sforza watched me with a keen scrutiny, expecting perhaps the severe observations of the Socialist on his unproductive consumption. But I had other objects in view.

"Been long in Rome?" he inquired, after the stray talk that was merely a feeling in the dark toward some real commencement.

"Off and on. Partly in the Monti Lepini."

He looked mildly at me. "Where?" said he.

"At Roccaforte," said I. "And do you know, Tiberio, I thought I saw you there one afternoon, in a funeral procession."

He was always pallid, but a relaxation in the lines of his mask betrayed amusement. "And I you! On the steps of San Romito. You were not wearing your present clothes. But I had not forgotten the face of Arden Massiter."

Then it was true, and this revelation came either as a clearing of the sky, or a crooked flash with thunder to follow it. What should I say? Before my mind was made up, Tiberio continued, "I thought you would be calling, when next you arrived in Rome. I have read some of your articles in the 'Clarion'—unsigned, sed novi tuos sonitus, as the eloquent Tully would observe—they are very fine, very true. Now you wish for my confidence. Really?" He sat up, caressed his bare chin, and threw a softer grace into his accent. We had been talking English, with an occasional phrase in Italian. The rest of the conversation was wholly in English.

"Let me send away Ascanio first—excuse me," said he, and he went out, spoke to the lad, and came back

after locking the outer door. I could hear the key turn. Was it a signal of danger? I had no weapons; but in a Roman palazzo, during broad day, there was probably not much temptation to murder a journalist. Accordingly, I waited for Tiberio to resume his seat.

The unpleasant and perplexing disproportion between his head-piece and the rest of his anatomy, which had often occupied my thoughts in our earlier acquaintance, now seemed more decided than ever. It was as though two designs had been carelessly fused in one, leaving the result to chance. With all his pallor, and in spite of his too coldly metallic eyes, Sforza had a beauty of countenance, though spoiled somewhat by an upper lip which was too long. His thick dark hair set off the pale forehead admirably. But then his figure was undersized, packed close, less graceful than muscular, and certainly too broad. If his mouth betrayed a flexibility which might mean cunning, his brawny arms were no unfit symbol of rude strength or even violence. In the lower face one might discern the versatile, possibly treacherous, lineaments of Mercury, god of thieves and business. The body was that of Hercules, diminished in height, but adamant, as though yet equal to his dozen labors. I never could think of such a man as my friend; I should be slow to choose him for an enemy.

Luncheon over, the door locked, and a silence that might be felt holding the palace in a dream from cellar to summit, we had the world to ourselves. As my host sat negligent in his easy-chair, with the light upon him, suddenly I remembered, and the next instant I saw, beneath his right ear, a mark, as of an old wound, or a cut made with some sharp instrument, the shape of a small ringworm, ruddy by contrast with the neck, which was of unusual whiteness. Finocchio had warned me to find out how Tiberio came by that signature. Was it

a brand—some token that he did not belong to himself? That it was due to accident I could not imagine.

Sforza crossed his legs carelessly, offered me a fresh cigarette, which I declined, and said in his most affectionate manner, "You heard the key turn a few seconds ago, my dear Arden? Bene; it has imprisoned you and me—locked us both in! We are *au secret*, as the French jailer has it. I respect your admirable qualities; I show my respect by unfolding the page of my history that you are thirsting to read."

"You expect me to keep the secret when it has been told me? I make no promise," said I, rising and standing before his chair.

He laughed gently, if such a word applies to the quietness that sent a shiver down my back. I should have preferred a tiger's roar. Lifting his large hand in deprecation, he continued, "It shall be, my dear friend, as you like it. Hear first, then go down into the Piazza Colonna, or up to the Piazza of St. Peter's, and shout at the top of your voice. To me it is all one. I leave the decision entirely in your hands. What say you?"

I hesitated; and I was lost. "You will hear me," concluded Sforza, jovially. "But you object to a long story. And I. The first question you put to me, in your tacit Britannic style, is how I come to be master of this little *ménage*, whereas in London I was out at elbows, a proletarian, whose black coat was always at the *monte di pietà*. Santiddio, but you English are commercial to the marrow. Why not ask about my ideals, my boyish hopes, my disillusiones, griefs, miseries, and final despair? Who is Tiberio Sforza? He is an anarchist. Was he always one? Perhaps. Did he know it always? I think not. Therein behold the tragedy that marches, marches day and night to its *dénouement*. Yet you will not ask me how?" His eyes

glistened like some night-wandering animal's through the smoke.

"Take me behind the scenes, or under the stage," I rejoined, stretching myself, "but please roll the five acts into one. What is it that makes rebels of us, whether anarchist as you or Socialist as I? The misery of our brothers and sisters, I suppose."

"Of our own," he added fiercely. "If I am starving, shall I love the man that has dined? If he rolls by in his carriage, and I am in the gutter, do you think I love him the more when he splashes me with mud? If society has cursed me from the womb, shall I bless and praise it? No, not I. Who is Tiberio Sforza? Shall I astonish you with the truth? Take it, then. *He is a king's bastard.* You can see it in his face, hands, and figure, if you have eyes."

The smoke cleared away as I leaned over to take my fill of gazing at this dangerous lunatic. He let me gaze, and uttered a name deep in his throat. "Well, do you deny the likeness?" he inquired with a scowl. It was extraordinary. So long as the features had that dark frown upon them they bore a resemblance, as peculiar as undoubted, to others which I knew well from a score of busts and photographs. Yet Tiberio, with his usually pallid cheeks and his refined profile, must have come of a very different stock on the mother's side. Nay, but were this an hallucination, his glass would confirm in it any man who saw reflected there a likeness so questionable (to borrow Shakspeare's word) as I saw then. And which of us did not know the page alluded to by Sforza in the chronique scandaleuse of our too gossiping days? The blood royal of an ancient house might be running in those veins. Tiberio perceived in my looks a tacit yielding to his argument. He laughed louder, rubbed his hands delightedly, and springing up, gave me a sudden blow, exclaiming,

"Salute my Royal Highness, you infidel. Don't you remember how you used to call me the Duke of Milan? I am better than that. A king's son—per Giove! though not the eldest; but as good as the best of them. I will prove it, too!" -

I ventured on a douche of cold water to this capering. "Altezza," I said gravely, "in royal houses it is the mother who makes the pedigree, I fear."

He became serious. "You are right. My mother was of high descent—oh, no fear as to pedigree; we trace it to the proudest line of Perugia, the Baglioni. But when this befel, the family had come low in the world, and she, poor girl, was a keeper's daughter at one of the royal shooting-lodges. He—this modern Cæsar—came, saw, and conquered. Then he went away and forgot. A passing whim! He plucked a wild rose out of the hedge, pulled it to pieces, and chucked it away. My mother went to the hospital. Her drunken old father—a scamp who was too fond of the flask—dropped or tumbled out of his situation. When I was born, devil knows where my royal parent had gone; so I went to the Foundling. I don't blame my mother. How could she help it? In fact, she did the only decent thing left—she died. I was always a bastard; now think of me as an orphan. Follow my career in a bird's-eye view. 'The Refuge,' you say in English. Ah, a blessed Refuge! Bad food, and not much of that; foul air, fouler companions; schooling a farce, the stick a reality; fights, bruises, wounds, outrages, a children's hell, made on purpose; *le seul autorisé par le gouvernement*. That was my home for thirteen years. Do you comprehend? Thirteen years! No wonder I had a raging devil inside me."

"You were a born anarchist, Tiberio," I said, making no attempt to hide the compassion which his dreadful tale provoked. "How did you get an education after all? Not in the Foundling."

“Diamine—yes, but in the Foundling. I was perhaps what the priests call vicious; what would they be, dear innocents, in a breeding-place like La Generale? Oh, where was all this? At Livorno—Leghorn. I count myself a Tuscan by birth; I speak the purest Della Crusca. Adunque! Devil I might be, but idiot, no! I *stole*—there is never any way of getting things, if you are a bastard and an orfanello, but to steal them. Therefore I stole a torn book of arithmetic, taught myself sums when I was not having the stick across my shoulders, and one day went on my knees to the Director, and implored him with abundance of tears to examine me in figures. Who was astonished but the good man? He tried me in the four rules; he made me work out fabulous riches in bills and invoices—simple interest, compound interest—devil take me if I could do as well now. I became a wonder in his eyes. Also I had kept a journal of what went on in the Foundling—very clever, to the life, witty for a lad of my age. He showed it to the others, among them a doctor, Franchi. The kind Franchi found me a situation in a small commercial house. I was launched.”

“And well launched. You had only now to keep on in the straight road.”

Tiberio fixed me with scornful eyes. “Arden, you a Socialist, and tell me so? You? But how was I launched? I had appetites, ambitions, let us say vices; and five lire a week, with a meal a day thrown in. Moreover, the drunken old grandfather, Naldo, came round now, when he heard that I was—launched! I did n’t want to let him have my few soldini. But he lay in wait for me, and took them. Then what was I to do? I stood it out three years, with old Sindbad’s legs round my neck, until one fine day I looked up, and I was carrying a corpse; Naldo was dead of his liquor. I should have written myself a free man; but they gave me no time.”

"Who gave you no time?"

"Well," he said reflectively, "my employers. We had a little difference. They said it was embezzling; I said it was borrowing. Anyhow, the tradesman is always a thief, and to cure thieving with thieving is homœopathy—Hahnemann's system. I *knew* they cheated; but they persuaded the jury that I did. Behold the foundling in prison."

This was news to me. Tiberio had been introduced to our London club as a man of some genius, anarchist in principle, well seen in Italian politics of a revolutionary cast. A turn in the prison-cell would no more have degraded him than it did the Russian patriots who came to us from the Petropaulovski fortress on the Neva, so long as it was not for ordinary crime. But embezzlement! I had to curb myself lest I should start away from Tiberio in disgust. He was watching me with all his eyes. The deadly pallor had, not deepened, but whitened.

"You were unlucky, Signor Sforza. I hope you did not stay long in prison."

"Not so unlucky," he answered with a meaning smile; "it is an apprenticeship as another. I met some of my comrades there again; the Foundling supplies inmates gratis to all public institutions. I can't say much for the salubrity of the Italian prison; it might be better ventilated. And one sleeps badly when murder is going on in the room."

"Murder in prison? You don't mean to tell me that the convicts commit murder inside a jail, with police and warders about?"

"They do it without asking leave, scores of them. Go and see for yourself. But I was giving you the biography of my poor Tiberio. In prison, as everywhere, he made friends. He found a brotherhood which took him to its arms. Below the robber-societies that

call themselves Church and State, monarchies, parliaments, middle-class, this unhappy bastard discovered a society of the miserable, in which he had a birthright. Their seal was stamped upon him. What are you looking at so intently, Arden?" he interrupted himself with a ghastly smile. "This mark under my ear? You know it? The brotherhood gave me that. Oh, as a love-token. In Naples, when a young fellow has a sweetheart, whom he wants to keep from the wolves, he just takes a razor, and slashes her on the cheek, under the right eye—Cienzo Saetta, his mark. She is safe then, I warrant you." He caressed the scar, as if it had been a decoration.

"Ah, the very thing I was curious to hear at first hand," said I. "All sorts of wild tales are told of the Camorra. What is the case really?"

"Join us, and you will learn."

"But is it spread through the prisons, as they say? Has it got a footing in the army? You talk of Naples. The Camorra in Naples, every one declares, is a thing of the past, dead and gone, like brigandage in the Abruzzi."

Tiberio's mirth was unbounded. "Oh, Dio mio! exactly," he cried; "it is dead, finished, under a big stone—hic jacet, pray for its poor soul! Like brigandage, blackmail, the Mafia in Sicily—or like company-promoting in your virtuous and pudibond Albion—it is no more. Ah, see what a thing is public opinion! The newspapers issue their decree, 'Let the Camorra cease,' and, presto, it is gone. But, my dear Arden, you restore my youth, so confiding are you in the journals."

I let him run on. "Then it lives still," I said when he quieted down.

"Lives? Yes, and flourishes. In the army, where the General Staff, to stamp out the plague, has cunningly scattered it through all the regiments; for every Camor-

rista becomes the nucleus of a lodge. In the prisons—but it was always in them—in the islands among convicts, from Elba to Santo Stefano and round to the Tremiti, off the Calabrian coast. In high life, also; here, at the doors of the Parliament, in the saloons of the noblesse—perhaps higher up still. And I—look at me, you English *révolté*, consider me well—I that you know as Tiberio Sforza am its master and king.”

He was standing erect, his right arm stretched toward me in a Ciceronian attitude, his voice no longer soft, his eyes burning. “You came for my secret,” he thundered; “take it. Will you give it tongue in the Piazza Colonna?”

I made no reply, as he sank breathless in his chair. I was hardly attending to him. My thoughts went over all I had been told, or in a desultory fashion had gathered up from my reading, of the Neapolitan Camorra. That it was a secret society, with passwords, rites, apprentices, companions, and masters, I knew. But in some trustworthy books I had seen a defense of it; in others it was described as a species of Italian Thuggee. The Government had put it down, with a high hand, several years previously, disbanding the lodges, drafting their members among the regiments of Lombardy and Romagna. With these consequences, it appeared!

There was silence in the room. My meditations grew somber. I did not pin my faith on Tiberio’s fresh claim to royal power, any more than I had given in to his legend of a royal descent. Frankly, I thought him crazed, but still dangerous. Marat was probably a lunatic, but of the homicidal sort, and he infected a whole people with his madness.

“What relation is there,” I asked at length—it might have been a question in a customs examination—“between your Camorra and the Mala Vita?”

Tiberio, stung by the indifference with which I had

heard his boasting, did not answer at once. Then he leaned across, rapped me on the shoulder and said, "Look here, you English go astray for want of imagination. You walk on the surface of things. We Italians are not only subtle but violent, a combination which you will never understand. We have had our Machiavelli in the same age with Cæsar Borgia and the Malatesta. I admire them all."

He was speaking his mind now. But I must drive my question home.

"The Mala Vita is a league for committing murder. Is that your platform?" I inquired.

He answered with an affectation of gaiety, "We neither approve nor disapprove of the Mala Vita; how could we? Murder is only a means. But sometimes a necessary means. Therefore it would be a mistake to discourage enthusiasm. You see I speak frankly. Nevertheless, I am not an Old Man of the Mountain, that loves killing for killing's sake. Indeed," he went on with a horrid grin, "I don't think I could come up to the last of our condottieri—Napoleon, you know. Some of his tastes were plainly criminal—as when he had half a dozen soldiers killed in a skirmish, just to let Madame Chose, his innamorata, see what it was like. I really could n't do that, now."

"Much to your credit," I answered gravely; "but you were observing that in the high Roman society there are Camorristi. Could one get to know them?"

"Certainly, if I gave you an introduction. But we have left poor Tiberio in prison at Porto Ferrajo! And I ought to be telling you how, thanks to the influence of a high functionary and the Camorra, he was released. Afterward, the dear lad's career was too checkered for a brief description. Basta! you saw him hard up, al verde, in Leicester Square; now you see him in the Palazzo Mocenni."

"Dare you reveal the name of that functionary?"

He smiled. "To you I dare. He is Don Camillo, eldest son of the Duke of Roccaforte—"

I finished the sentence for him in derisive astonishment. "And son-in-law of Scanza, the Prime Minister. Nay, Signor Tiberio, that beats all."

"You will not be satisfied without a proof!" he said. "Ebbene! Join me here in evening dress the second night from this at ten. We will pay Don Camillo a visit. He gives a great entertainment; you shall talk to him at supper in his own house. Will that satisfy you? Now we suspend our session. Sorry you must go."

Grasping my fingers and murmuring good wishes, the lord of the Camorra dismissed me. But through the gate of horn or the gate of ivory who shall say? I walked to Finocchio's in a trance. The little man gave me one searching side-look, and read his lesson in my face. He will never mention Tiberio in my hearing if he can help it. And now I have written this account of our interview, to guard against what may happen.

CHAPTER XI

TWO NOCTURNES IN ROME

THE ivory gate by which dreams pass out and in! That Virgilian image stayed with me. How much of Tiberio's cynical narrative could I trust? He was capable of monomania, megalomania; given over, assuredly, to a strong delusion, a liar and the victim of lies. My British instinct, unseduced by his fiction of an estate left him, cool in the presence of anarchist ideals, would still demand how the pauper of Leicester Square came to be the fine gentleman in his dressing-gown of the Palazzo Mocenni. Was it by well-concerted plots, of which every modern capital furnished examples in a rising average? Did fraud lend a hand to murder? There kept running in my head two horrible Italian words—poisonous rats behind the mental tapestry; one was "l'accattatore," the blackmailer; and one "il manutengolo," the receiver of stolen goods. Which represented Tiberio? Or did both? By his own confession he stood on the edge of darkness; but it was more than likely that he had plunged into its hollow depths, where revolution turns to crime.

His frankness, real or feigned, was making me its accomplice. I might denounce him to the Government as an escaped convict; where had I any proofs? Nay, the Government was Don Camillo—was Scanza; did the go-between of the Camorristi play a second part,

and act the spy? Social order, in these days, like a conjurer's tea-caddy, had many false bottoms. Even in London we had grown familiar with sham conspiracies got up by the police; among my acquaintance I had fallen in with pied ravens—monstrosities in black and white—that knew how to croak treason, and afterward strut gravely as Queen's evidence into the witness-box. Which of all these was Tiberio Sforza?

Denounce him I could not. Turn my back and flee I would not. The doubtful something which I had gleaned in our conversation must yield more light. Italians had long been past-masters in the art of conspiracy; from the Carbonari to the Mano Nera of Girgenti and the Fratellanza, what a record they might show! And always, not a doubt of it, their inevitable lapse into murder justified Tiberio's doctrine, borrowed from Machiavelli, to make all sure by death. I had prepared for my journey to Rome by reading up the native literature on Mafia and Camorra, in which, by hints and side-glances rather than open testimony, the secrets of these associations were whispered. Sforza was right; our English training abhors the underhand. We detest sneaks, spies, surveillance, the whole damnable system which sovereigns and subjects practise on the Continent of watching behind doors and windows, and stabbing men in the back. It was my unconquerable dislike to sneaking that forbade, even at this perilous hour, denunciation on my part of the anarchist to the authorities. Let them do their filthy work themselves. I had no share in his plots and plans. But I would follow them out until I saw what they aimed at. So now to Don Camillo's!—

"One word in your ear," said Sforza, during our drive under a moonlit sky toward the Porta Pia, near which, in the Via Venti Settembre, within a stone's

throw of the British Embassy, Don Camillo held his court. "I delivered an allocution to you on Wednesday in my character of wolf, '*una lupa, d'ogni magrezza carca,*' sings the divine poet—a wolf hungry and lean. But now we are on our way to the assembly of foxes; and I lay my wolfskin aside. In my friend's house"—with a diabolic emphasis on "friend"—"I appear as a man of some property, retired in my habits, dilettante in my tastes, more concerned with pictures than with poignards—indeed, I have no concern at all with these latter, as you know. I beg you, therefore, to act up to the rôle which I have undertaken. Camillo is slightly timid: you will spare his nerves."

"All I know of you, Signor Tiberio, is what I saw in your visit to England," said I. "If it pleases you to put on and take off a series of masks in Italy, that is your look out, not mine. In short, I neither meddle nor mar; and I reserve my freedom of action."

"Oh, you reserve your freedom of action," he said gleefully. "How British! how independent! But see, we are passing the Ministry of War, upon whose portals I should like to inscribe a Sicilian proverb, '*E duci lu vinu, ma cahiù duci è lu sangu di li Cristiani*' (Wine is sweet, the blood of the people is sweeter). And below us admire that colossal edifice, nearly as big as St. Peter's, but not so beautiful—it is the Ministry of Finance. On its portal I would write a briefer sentence, '*Chirompe paga.*' By the living God, our friends are paying out of their red veins. But here is Don Camillo's."

We found ourselves in a line of carriages. Tiberio leaped out, dismissed his own, and bade me follow him to a portone blazing with lights. We gave our names and ascended a broad staircase. I noticed that the floor of the entrance hall was slightly uneven; some of the stairs had lurched to one side and never recovered

themselves; and down the stuccoed wall I traced a fine fissure, undulating like a serpent which had crawled along when it was damp and recent. I pointed out these tokens of bad building to Sforza. His eyes sparkled.

"The palace stands on thirty feet of Roman rubbish," he said smiling, "heaped up since the day when Hannibal was encamped outside the Colline Gate. Stands, and is settling down! Our good Camillo should take heed to it. Ma, zucca! There he is, and the Minister Scanza—quel grosso—with him. We are in luck's way."

"Now," said I to myself, "I shall make certain whether Tiberio is an impostor." No, it seemed not. His new high-sounding name had echoed into the saloon; my foreign one, though less difficult than many, had passed without observation. Don Camillo, the center of a lively group, gave an almost imperceptible start, and took a step forward. The pair shook hands cordially; I was presented as a famous English correspondent of that illustrious London newspaper, the "*Clarion*," and Don Camillo shook hands instantly with me. A cold hand, smooth and somewhat clammy; withdrawn almost at once to make a gesture as if the Prince were fatigued; but was it a signal to my companion? The hand was passed along the face, and rested a moment with open fingers on the chin. I could not observe Tiberio, who was standing a little behind me; but in that pose of languor and contemplation—for it partook of both—Don Camillo, with his worn features, thin lips, bald forehead, and false white teeth, offered an amazing contrast to his brother Gaetano, whose looks came often before my memory. Was this the triumphant Minister of State, his breast covered with decorations—the Grand Cross of the Annunziata glittering among them? I judged

him broken in health, embarrassed, and not brave. He opened his mouth: it was to discourse platitudes.

Not less remarkable, it seemed to me, was the contrast between the palazzo in the Via Venti Settembre, with the guests whom Camillo was entertaining, and Roccaforte, with its picturesque throng of wild but amusing young nobles. Allow for my jaundiced vision, which, I confess, never has been able to see grace or beauty in the Philistines who now govern the world and set the fashion. But I could not be mistaken in thinking these overloaded rooms pretentious and vulgar, crammed with Parisian ware such as one buys (or the man of a little discernment does not buy) in the Rue de Rivoli or Aux Grands Magasins du Louvre. It was not unmitigated prejudice that shrugged its shoulders at the aping by middle-class Italian women of the least becoming of French modes et robes. Nor did my hatred of an inartistic bourgeoisie deceive me into supposing that I was hearing all round me a language as confused as Babel—the guttural Piedmontese accent of the Alps expressing itself in hybrid phrases, in the doubtful English of the Jockey Club, and in the argot of thieves transplanted from the Parc Monceau, where it has made itself a home. I heard, too, the jargon of journals which dabble in finance, and which write every European language with a slight suspicion of the Ghetto coloring their style. Foreigners like myself were in plenty, wandering through the rooms or gathered round the piano, at which—and this, too, was significant—all the performers delivered their quota of Transalpine music. One sang “Adelaïde,” another gave selections from “Tristan,” a third struck out for us the saturnine chords of Grieg, or melted into moonlight sentiment with Schumann. I know how to appreciate our sublime masters. All I say is that from these rooms Mozart and even Boito were banished. Where, at Don Camillo’s

festival, did the art, the language, the manners of Italy, find their place? Nowhere. "Must it ever be so?" I asked, with real sadness in my tone as in my feeling, of a guest who stood by me. "Has your Italy driven out the barbarians only to copy what is least admirable in them?"

He answered with equal sadness, "I have almost ceased to hope for better things. Our age of heroes—where is it? Gone with Cavour, Garibaldi, and the King. We have fallen upon evil days. Lawyers govern us; politics are a perpetual intrigue; our literature, like our painting and sculpture, is a bad copy of the French Realism. You do well to lament; but what shall *we* do, the last of a people who have created two civilizations, and now take their art from Paris and their science from Berlin?"

"My dear Professor Rainaldi—you here?" exclaimed Don Camillo, passing at the moment. "Where have you been this age? I am delighted. But, of course," with a shade of melancholy on his brow, that touched me as if the real man had come to the surface, "you do not appear in Rome on my account. What learned person are you expecting here to-night?"

"I came to pay my respects to Don Camillo. But I was in hopes that Signor Girolami would be among your guests," said Professor Rainaldi, looking round as he spoke.

The Prince moved away.

"You, then, are the famous Rainaldi, whose books we read in England," I said, bowing to the quiet man with the clear gray eyes. "Pardon me, are they not literature as well as history? We should not despair of this beautiful land were there many such books."

"Thank you, sir," he answered in English, "you encourage me. But the sky is full of clouds. I was Senator of the Kingdom, Minister of Education; I have

given it up, and devote myself to researches in our archives, as my friend Girolami devotes himself to the study of social causes. We belong to the past or the future. What can we make of the present? Our poverty is appalling; our institutions are exotics; the Church is in everlasting feud with the State; and—but, at last, you will hear an Italian cantatrice! Here is Signora Tarquinia!”

Yes, at last, and I was enchanted. While the music held us, there was no more talk. Then we found ourselves at supper in a large dining-room; and I, whom Don Camillo treated with a distinction not always bestowed on journalists, but due, I suspect, to Sforza, might now pursue my studies in contrasts, by looking at the Principessa, his wife, near whom I sat, and listening while she talked. A little way removed from her was the Signora Tarquinia—large, stout, bright-eyed, and good-tempered; with a voice like a pealing organ, and the most dramatic pair of hands, as full of tragedy or comedy as her own repertoire. But the contrast I had in mind was not between the actress and Donna Camilla; it was between this lady and her sister-in-law at Roccaforte, the charming *dévôte* Costanza. The Prince's wife resembled in some points her father, *quel grosso*, as Tiberio called him. At our table he, too, was seated; but he said nothing, and seemed intent on the good things to which he brought a young man's appetite. Signor Scanza was robust, florid, aquiline, with bushy white eyebrows and formidable jaws. His daughter showed the same bright tints, adding to them a simper which disclosed excellent teeth and a fatiguing absence of variety. She wore many rings, twisted them often round her fingers, was always making sure that she sat quite straight, and never asked or answered a question without laughing. But her laugh had no character; it might have sprung out of a phonograph.

I acknowledge, sincerely but impenitently, that I hated Donna Camilla the minute she began to speak.

On the other hand, who would not adore the Signora Tarquinia? Gay and sprightly, she wore a very big heart on her sleeve. While the two women talked, both fast and loud, I had no trouble in listening to them and answering Don Camillo when he put civil inquiries about Englishmen he had known. Ah yes, it was, said Tarquinia, her last appearance for the season. Her doctors had put some queer instrument down her throat, menaced her with a total loss of voice—"you would never think so, cara Principessa, to hear me now, confess it"—and she must go into retreat; become one of the "sepolte vive"—an order of cloistered nuns in the Via Magnanapoli. And whither was she going into retreat? Oh, first to Roccaforte! That dear Costanza, her young friend in their convent days, had asked her.

"So, Costanza is a dear?" laughed the Princess Camilla. "But she is also a Sant' Agnese, a lamb, fit to be offered in January with the other lambs in the church outside Porta Pia. She never invites us to Roccaforte; no, indeed, wicked Freemasons that we are!"

"When you do go into that medieval den, Signora," growled the aquiline Scanza, looking up suddenly from his plate, "tell the young man who guards it—Don Gaetano—that we Freemasons, as my daughter says, have our eyes upon him. He and his Guelfs are rather too zealous lately, with their meetings, banners in church, and what not. But the law must be respected. Tell him that from me."

The actress, instead of answering, hummed a stave of the "Marseillaise" under her breath.

"Yes, yes," replied Scanza, his growl softening to a smile, "liberté, liberté chérie. All very fine! But respect the law."

"Apropos, Signor Principe," said Tiberio, turning to Camillo, "perhaps I might do the Premier's errand if the Signora is coy. I am no politician, you are aware of that. But so much the better. Send me to the castle. I have long wished to know Don Gaetano. And 'blessed are the peacemakers,' says Holy Writ."

These words struck on my ear, and a stream of ice ran along my veins. I was relieved by Camillo's reply, given with extreme courtesy. "My influence would not avail, I fear, to open the castle gates, dear sir. It is years since I entered them myself."

"Regrettable, indeed," cried Tiberio; "but perhaps our English friend, who has just been your father's guest, would have the kindness to introduce me."

I was the object of all eyes. "You have been staying at Roccaforte?" said Camillo in his subdued tones. "I envy you. Did you leave my father well?"

"The Duke seems in more robust health than yourself, Prince," I answered. "He has the vigor and steadiness of a mountaineer."

"Long may it be so!" fervently exclaimed the Prince. "But he has never forgiven me the share I took in our country's regeneration. And Gaetano, my half-brother, who cannot remember the old Papal rule, is violent against me."

"Never mind, Don Camillo," said the Prime Minister, "with a strong Government we shall put down these remains of barbarism. The nobles who will not be democrats have had their day. Italy requires one law, and one executive. The Center is beginning to understand that much. The South is our difficulty. I say it, though a Sicilian. In the South is our Ireland, backward, still feudal, too ignorant to comprehend the benefits of army, schools, taxation, and industry. But we know how to deal with it. We have cleared out the banditti. We shall next reform feudalism."

"But give me a chance of seeing what it is like," said Tiberio, "before it disappears. Come, Signor Massiter, I depend on you for an introduction to this medieval castle."

I murmured something indistinct and looked round for an escape. The actress came up to me. "Perhaps we shall meet at the Rocca," she said with her open smile. "You worship Donna Costanza, don't you? We all do. She is not the Sant' Agnese our hostess calls her; much more like Diana, with her lofty brow and those flashing eyes. What will be her destiny? She is too rare and singular for marriage—as marriage goes in the world now. But neither ought she to lose herself among the sepolte vive. She should be a Santa Caterina or a Vittoria Colonna. Good-night, and a rivederci!"

Tiberio proposed that we should walk home. The night was exquisite and almost as brilliant as day, under a fair round moon. The white buildings that line both sides of the narrow street terminating at Monte Cavallo had now something of the aspect which gives to a Venetian calle its peculiar charm. But the edifices were too irregular, too much a succession of barracks; and indeed a sentinel was pacing up and down at intervals before some public office or by the side entrances of the Quirinal.

Rome does not keep late hours. The streets were comparatively deserted. My companion talked in overflowing spirits. "You perceive that I am not romancing," he said. "I can meet Prince or Premier on their own ground. However, bear this in mind: they neither of them know me as you do. The Prince—do you think he will live long? a frail constitution, it appears to me—the Prince some thirty years ago joined an association which was then purely political and monarchical, acting in Rome on behalf of the Casa Savoya.

It has since enlarged its platform. But it has not loosened its grip on Don Camillo. He is timid—an aspen somewhat middle-aged and very tremulous. Scanza is quite another pair of sleeves—Sicilian, Mafioso, a conspirator from his youth up, a disciple of Mazzini, and a good deal besides. Curious; this country is governed by Piedmontese soldiers and Sicilian brigands! They call that progress. Oh, there are avvocati besides! I don't deny it. But they have to bribe the brigands as well as pay the soldiers. By the by, you introduce me at Roccaforte?"

I made no answer. While Tiberio pursued his monologue, which I was not in the humor to interrupt, we had come to the open space where Castor and Pollux are standing with their steeds. The jingle of the tram-cars, mostly empty but never silent, filled the air. On the broad steps beneath us two or three mendicants were lying in tattered cloaks. The moon shed its intensely clear rays upon the palace formerly known as the Consulta, now the Foreign Office; it shone over the roofs of the Quirinal, above whose great front entrance we could read distinctly the escutcheon with its writing, "Paulus Quintus, Pontifex Maximus." To our left, as we took our stand by the horse-tamers, extended in solemn brightness the panorama of the city, away over the Campus Martius and as far as the Vatican, where the colossal dome rose up, always solitary, like a note of interrogation, asking how long these lesser monuments should endure beside it.

Tiberio seemed to have forgotten his question. He folded his arms, threw back his beautiful sinister face, and gazed long in a species of trance at the Royal Palace asleep under the moon. I stood where his eyes betrayed their every movement to me. At first half-smiling, his features gradually grew hard and sullen; his looks would have pierced the walls. I saw the blood

leave his lips, and his breathing become slightly convulsive. "As God is above," I said to myself, "this man is plotting murder." And, impelled by some obscure motive, without reflection, I took him roughly by the arm and said in a low voice, "Ma, Tiberio, tu mediti un omicidio!"—giving expression to the thought which had crossed my mind.

He started, shook me off, and came to himself. "Accidentaccio!" he exclaimed, "God strike you dead—what did you say?"

"What were *you* staring at, in your mood of Macbeth?" I answered, pulling him to one side. "Let us get away from those agents of the police: they are watching us. Do you fancy they admire your tragic posturings at this time of night, before the King's threshold? Come, let us walk." And I turned him toward the Via Nazionale.

"But you said—you said," he stammered, in tones which manifested some apprehension, "that I was meditating—never say that again," he whispered, clenching his teeth, "never, as you value your life."

"You are moonstruck in all this brilliancy," I said, laughing. "Come, where shall we go? Those police keep in the offing, it seems to me. Why did you stand where every one could see your antics?"

"Oh, to be sure," answered Sforza, recovering himself and speaking very loud, "I think your marionetti most ingenious. But you must play Frà Currado just as I was showing you." He stopped, folded his arms once more, and gave his whole attitude a burlesque appearance which I could not sufficiently admire. The policemen had come within earshot. They turned now and paced toward the Quirinal, as if resuming their beat. Somehow, I could have wished the moon were not so clear just then. But a full moon has always

troubled my fancy; perhaps it had affected Tiberio likewise.

We had roamed as far as the Banca d'Italia, where my ill-fated Street of the Serpents takes its beginning. On catching sight of the name, I paused and was for turning back, by the Torre di Milizie, in the direction of Trajan's Forum; but Tiberio, who had completely shaken off his trance, said, in those persuasive tones which I was learning to dislike, "No, no, we will go down this way to the Colosseum, and look in at the Trattoria Ranieri as we pass."

"The Trattoria—what—?" I cried out. It was my turn to feel uncomfortable.

Whereupon Tiberio laughed—a dry, short laugh—and repeated the words. "You know the Ranieri," he went on, "per Bacco, you are known there too! Make a long story short, won't you, my dear assassin?"—Oh, with what relish he turned the word under his tongue!—"Virtue can't be hid. We both attended the funeral, didn't we?—you as chief mourner, I as a Frate di Misericordia. Poor Renzaccio!"

This was too much. I dragged him back from the horrid street, and moved on hastily, holding him by the wrist, in the direction I had first chosen, until we came to the church of SS. Domenico e Sisto. There we halted and looked one another in the face.

"So you knew everything when you passed me on the steps of San Romito?" I said, throwing into my words a savage energy. "But what was Renzaccio to you, that you should be wanting at this hour to trepan me at Ranieri's? You think me such an idiot as to put myself into that wolf's throat again? What do you mean?"

He had allowed me to pull him along without resistance, but he was not frightened, hardly excited. "We

must not wander away from the Banca d'Italia," he said calmly. "If you decline to enter Ranieri's—for which you have the best of reasons—let us wait up here. I expect a messenger." And with that he retraced his steps. I followed him reluctantly, and we were soon standing outside the Bank again.

"Ouf!" he exclaimed, shaking himself and feeling his lips, "we have talked your tongue of frogs and crocodiles this hour. It has made my mouth sore. Still—to finish the lesson—a little more of the British idiom. Yes, caro Signore, when you saw me in the white domino, and I you in a costume that did not altogether fit you, I was acquainted with everything. But not till then! The comrades who beheld you strike Renzo had described to me an Englishman—for some heard the gendarmes pronounce your name—but your dress and appearance were not English. I congratulate you on an excellent disguise. Renzo, you should be told, was rescued from the carabinieri within half an hour after his arrest. The boys did their work to perfection. He was wounded slightly in the scuffle; but had your cane not smashed his head he would be alive this day. When he was seized with epilepsy—or whatever they call it—the comrades took him up to Roccaforte, and laid him at Nonna Candia's door. They told me I should find him there, as I certainly did; but I was not expecting to see the lad cold. When, during the procession, my eye fell upon an Englishman, bent and sobbing, on the church steps, while the corpse moved up toward him, the truth flashed upon me. And the Englishman—the homicide—was you, Arden Massiter!"

"What if it was?" I cried furiously; "how does that concern you?"

"How, my friend? Renzaccio and I had dealings together. He was one of ours, from the first days of

his imprisonment in the Isola del Giglio. More than that"—and the sullen expression which had startled me upon Monte Cavallo came out on his features—"I had great hopes of training Renzaccio. Now my labor is lost. However, you will make it good by unbolting the gates of Roccaforte to me."

"Shall I make it good to you? Not in that way, I swear. You don't dream," I went on with boundless contempt, "that *I* am one of yours?"

He laughed outright. "But I do," he said, after a pause; "how can you help it?"

CHAPTER XII

DIS MANIBUS

MY rage was too violent for speech. I left him and paced to and fro, gnawing my heart within me, conscious that if I did not keep down the rising devil I should strike him, even as Renzaccio had been struck, with the cane I had in my hand, now quivering like a thing that felt with me and would do my bidding. This was the second time I had experienced such a fit of madness. Tiberio glanced my way, knew the atmosphere to be thunder-laden, and posted himself a few yards off, in the Via dei Serpenti. After a considerable interval I heard him exclaim, "Ah, finalmente! Behold my messenger!" A tall young man, hardly more than a youth, came running breathlessly up to us. His hat was off; I recognized him at a glance. It was the beautiful Apollo whose life I had saved—yes, Carluccio—his curly locks in disorder, his eyes starting, his lips apart. He was panting like a dog.

"You have made me wait," said Tiberio, in the tone of Louis Quatorze. The slender young god—a slave now—absolutely cringed. "He was late, Maestro; I ran all the way," said he, with hands almost clasping in a silent gesture. "He is alone"—and some words passed, the meaning of which I could not make out. They appeared to satisfy the great man, whose lips no longer tightened, while his mellow accents bespoke an

endeavor to efface the impression left by our late colloquy. "Then I will bid you a happy night, Signor," he said to me, uncovering. "Our friend here, Carluccio, will see you home instead of my humble self." With that he stepped out briskly, drawing his cloak round him, as though intending a longish promenade.

Carluccio waited, not uncertain—the honeyed words amounted to a command. But his fawn-like eyes rested on me beseechingly. "Come," I said, "we will walk and talk a little, giovane mio. I am not going home. Can you tell me of a pleasant excursion at this time of night?"

I put my arm in his, and drew him toward Trajan's Forum, where the Emperor's column was casting a gigantic shadow across the square. We moved on in that peculiarly intense silence which is a prelude to momentous speech. At length Carluccio said faltering, "It is true, then, Signor; you are one of ours."

The second time I had heard these detestable words! "No, thank God, not yet," I cried. The young man seemed in a puzzle. "But he is your friend," said Carluccio. "You came to meet him at Ranieri's, non è vero?"

I could not deny it. "Then you must be friends," he concluded, "although you don't know our signs or passwords. Ah, perhaps a forestiere! It will be that. Besides, the maestro is very secret. Know you where he is hurrying to-night? I would show you, if you had not fear."

"Of what should I have fear, Carluccio?" I said, turning on him, so that I might decipher his meaning in his looks. "The man is not a real friend of mine; but you ought to be." This adjuration wrought strangely upon him. "Oh I, Signor caro!" he murmured, "but I would die for you! Did you not save this face of mine from the coltello of that wild beast? But yet, if

you were fond of the maestro and told him, what should I do?"

He was clinging, in a childlike way, to my arm with both hands. "You are a pazzarello—a dear idiot—Carluccio," said I, half laughing, but feeling the rage in my throat again that had nearly choked me outside the Banca d'Italia. "No language will express my hatred of Tiberio. Lead the way, I tell you."

"Who is that—Tiberio?" asked the lad, with a perplexed air.

"Who? Why Tiberio Sforza, the villain we have just left to go on his bad business. Is not that his name?"

"Might be!" answered Carluccio, with the ingrained politeness which makes his countrymen so seductive—and so impossible. "We call him only Livorno. But you hate him, under any name. And what does a poor lad like me feel, think you, for a demon that looks and strikes as Livorno? Yes, strikes; more—I have seen him put his heel on a man's face, knock out his teeth with his boot. That is the maestro. Do I love him? Tell the crows that."

This interchange of sentiments had been proceeding while we crossed over by the piazza of the Capitol, and down toward the Aventine—my guide taking a direction which he had selected for reasons best known to himself. The steady moonlight showed us ancient, dilapidated buildings—the singular arch of Janus with its four gateways, the brick campanile and columned portico of Santa Maria in Cosmedin, the round temple by the Tiber, dedicated to some unknown god or goddess, which has the appearance of a classic wedding-cake, with its quaint roof of brown tiles. Then we moved on again at a rapid pace, and we were out in the vineyards that lie behind the immense Baths of Caracalla. There was abundance of shade when we

approached these piles of lonely and unkempt ruins, which in their sleep of death kept an air so forbidding. Carluccio pulled up now, as though uncertain. "You are not afraid?" he whispered. "If you are we can go back. Not? Very well. Now it is across the road. Quick, we must not be seen. Ah, into those bushes! And silence! For your life, silence!"

Creeping on hands and knees, taking advantage of every hollow in the crumbling, grass-grown soil, and blessing the streaks of malarious mist that floated among the vineyards, we advanced so as to create no alarm except to some sleeping bird that now and then rose with a flutter. Even these slight incidents detained us. Carluccio grew visibly impatient. But now the moon was setting; a grayer and gloomier light came over the slumbering fields. We crept on farther, behind dense masses of brickwork, upon which time had planted a miniature forest, through the green labyrinth of whose branches we thrust on as carefully as if we were treading in a rose-garden. My comrade stopped frequently; but in the stillness we could hear no movement. More than once he put his finger to his lips. I nodded assent; he might depend on me. At a certain point he pulled my arm gently forward, holding his breath, and motioned me into a position behind him. In the brickwork there was a rent of no great magnitude, concealed by the branches, yet allowing a narrow glimpse into the interior of the ruin. I could look without being detected at the curious sight within.

I called the place a ruin. But though its walls had lost many yards, here and there, of brick or travertine, it still kept its lofty roof; there was a staircase inside all but perfect, nearly opposite us, and a stout column in the center supported the square edifice. More than half of it was sunk in the ground beneath the accumu-

lated débris of centuries. But as I viewed it with the moonlight making checkers on the floor, and the grayish-white walls exhibiting tier upon tier of loculi or pigeonholes, many of which held dusty patenæ, somewhat resembling fruit-plates, I could have fancied myself in a museum. Such, in truth, it was; but a museum of the dead, where literal ashes, taken from the funeral pyre, had been stowed away in classic urns, with epitaphs, often consisting of the name only, and now for the most part effaced, to indicate the noble Roman family, whose slaves or freedmen these tenants of the shelves had been. It was an immense columbarium, or dove-cote, one of several which stood in close neighborhood among the vines and fig-trees skirting the road to the Porta San Sebastiano.

All that I took in at a glance, the moon serving yet to enlighten this underground hall of burial. But into one corner I could peer more distinctly, for a rude earthen lamp was burning there, of the kind which abounds at Pompeii, and in the circle of its illumination stood a couple of men, cloaked and hatted, so bent upon their own doings that they never once looked up from the loculus, or sideboard, on which one was laying out papers and the other counting them carefully. My guide's hold became a grip. He, too, could see and be astonished.

The cloaked person smoothing out, with visible reluctance, his small thin papers on the funeral slab, I had never beheld. The other, as I expected, was Tiberio. They spoke hardly at all; the operation went forward as by clockwork, save only that the wheels of the clock seemed rusty, and gave an occasional creak or jerk, while the papers mounted into heaps. I had plenty of leisure to scan the countenance, and form my judgment of the character, of Sforza's vis-à-vis. There was little fear that we outside should be detected.

Certain friendly owls occupied the topmost ledges of the columbarium, and now, troubled by the moon or the lamp, feeble as they were becoming, they flew wildly about, making a welcome diversion. Carluccio, emboldened, put a hand before his mouth and whispered in my ear, "Santa Fiora!"

I made the motion with my lips which would have articulated "Brigand?" The answer was plain in his eyes.

Santa Fiora did not correspond to his sanctified name. If a flower at all, he was a flower of evil, wickedness stamping itself legibly on every one of his petals, as the hyacinth bore a lament for beauty on its tender leaves. Thin, wiry, and willowy, the apparition would have served well instead of the painted snake which Romans set up to warn intruders away from tombs and sacred inclosures. His long, lean jaws had a venomous snap in them; his distorted nose and a squinting eye gave one the impression of some unsightly fowl that had met with an accident; his forehead, of which he had a good deal, went up to a narrow crown, resembling a sugar-loaf; and on neck and shoulders fell ringletted black hair, which finished off the illusion of a human serpent. Over against him Tiberio was fascinating, in spite of his fixed pallor. This malignant weed struck one as unclean—a toadstool, or other slimy fungus, that dare not be touched, impregnable in its pollution. The thing did not speak much, but occasionally it winced or frowned, as smitten with sudden anguish. Still it laid out of long fingers the piles of notes; evidently money was changing hands. And still Tiberio counted, cool and imperturbable.

A scene like that which we were contemplating, if it excites the nerves, has also in it a power to stir the imagination; the spectator may be conscious of a vision within, while losing not a movement of the actors be-

fore his eyes. To me, standing silent there, came the vivid reflection of a world all dust and shadow—*pulvis et umbra sumus*—fallen so low from its golden glories. Rome Imperial, that built magnificently even for its dead slaves; built on the royal Appian Way, nor spared its marble entablatures, its delicate paintings, remnants of which I could trace under the setting moon, its yearly returning festivals and libations, with flowers laid on tombs, and all the graceful homage which it paid to phantoms, feared, yet still beloved—was it come to this? Here, in this place of the Manes, inviolate and holy, did wretches steeped in murder balance their accounts, exchanging blood-money; and only the owl shrieked, no shape arose from the under-world to scourge them hence with scorpions, or terrify them with apparitions into madness. An impotent, dead, forgotten universe, over the decaying heaps of which this putrescence crawled and multiplied!

My vision did not hinder me from remarking that the action of the scene had paused abruptly. Santa Fiora counted no more notes on the slab; Tiberio pointed down as if requiring a larger tribute. Their voices rose; they were in hot dispute over the business. But they spat out at one another a jargon, brief and horrible, which to me was an unknown tongue. The human serpent hissed; the tiger answered with formidable movements and a low and thunderous roar. From thieves' slang they broke into sentences of Italian. I heard a quick repartee of demand and refusal.

"Why no more to you?" whistled Santa Fiora in a cracked tenor. "I pay down forty thousand lire out of sixty we got, and your palm itches. *Ma, barone*"—which is, being interpreted, "Look here, my lord!"—"you will leave the boys without a *baiocco*. It cannot be, I tell you." His hand clutched the remaining notes.

"Five thousand more, Santa Fiora," said Tiberio, not heeding the argument, "then I take myself off. The boys are doing well. They know it is for the cause they are laying up this money. What do I spend on my own amusement? Why, not enough to buy sweet parsley."

"Managgia!" whined the human serpent, "Devil be good to me! A wise man does not flay his own skin. Leave the bees a little honey. What would you have got by the fat old borgese, had our piciotti, our bravoni, not thrown a rope round his horns?"

"Eh, blood of San Pantaleone!" answered Tiberio with his gay and facetious accent, "and when would the piciotti have caught him, if some one else had not watched where he was feeding? Quick, the five thousand! Remember, it is the cause."

"Oh, the cause, the cause, Livorno mio! What care I for la politica? I love the good old trade. Did Gasparone meddle with State affairs? Yet who like Gasparone? Send us plenty on the roads that we can skin, and let politics go to the great devil!"

"The five thousand!" repeated Tiberio. "See, the moon is down; why do we stand prating? Eh, mio cuore, know you not the house dog must be fed? Feed me—if not—"

This sudden aposiopesis, or rhetorical pause, seemed to have in it the weight of a cavalry charge. Santa Fiora groaned like a man whose throat is getting cut; and the reckoning began again. Carluccio, motionless and attentive hitherto, signed that we must creep further away, which we did with infinite precautions. There was a choking sense of malaria in my mouth, a nausea that I could hardly keep down. Our clothes were wet with the night-dews, our limbs benumbed and heavy. The sky was opening out in small gleams of dawn, spectral above this melancholy region, where

masses of irregular and fantastic outline began to appear more solidly through the accursed air. We crouched and waited. In half an hour we saw leaping out of the ruined columbarium, on the side nearest us, Santa Fiora, alone. He seemed to carry no weapon, but as he strode on within a yard of our hiding-place, I could see a brace of pistols showing their noses from under his dark-blue vest. He kept a sharp lookout in front, and soon vanished in the direction of Cecilia Metella's round tomb. "Where does he prowl mostly?" I inquired of Carluccio. To which the lad answered, "Anywhere between Rome and the Montagna del Mattese,"—above Cassino—"but when there is nothing doing, the lads stanno a casa; they wait till they get a signal from the capobanda. It is not as in the old days, when once a brigand always a brigand. Then they lived in the open and enjoyed themselves. Now they must expect the manutengolo to send them business."

"And Tiberio—Livorno, as you call him—is the manutengolo?"

"But surely! who else? Without him Santa Fiora could do no stroke. He says true. Have you seen how we catch birds with a looking-glass and a net, in the fields? Livorno is the man that holds glass and net. So he takes the fat breasts of the birds, and we eat their thin legs. Ma pazienza! Will he always have the breasts?"

I began to share in Carluccio's sentiments of revolt; dimly there flitted through my fever-haunted brain some project of taking into our confidence the hideous Santa Fiora, and getting him to betray the betrayer. So soon does one sicken with the plague of treachery in an atmosphere charged with it. "But is there no pursuit of these gentlemen by the military?" I asked.

"We strangers are always assured that brigandage is dead with the old governments."

"It is dead and not dead," answered my companion; "but what happens is this: Livorno fixes on a rich man, finds out something bad against him—there is always a crime or a shame in the rich man's big sack—then draws him into an appointment outside the city. He is seized, carried into the mountains, held to ransom, but he must get the money without making a chiasso, or ringing the church bells. If he says no, his crime walks to the front—he is done. He never says no; he always gets the money for us. After it is paid, he returns a casa sua, tells them he was ill, on distant business, carding and combing—what you please! So our lads take only the wicked—and why not? We must save the mouth for the figs!"

Thus Carluccio, with his Robin Hood philosophy. But during his artless talk, we had observed Tiberio crossing the public road and disappearing from view over the high walls which surround the Baths of Caracalla. It was time to separate. My resolution had grown to a head. "Come and see me at Roccaforte," I charged the young brigand, "whither I shall proceed this very day. I will but return to Rome for my baggage. With your villainous chief I will never have dealings from henceforth. As soon as I have taken farewell of the Duke Sorelli, I will set out on my travels to other parts. But I should like to have some further conversation with you."

"Bene, Signore, if I can, I will. You do as a wise man to go. Yet I must give word to Livorno that you visit Roccaforte. I am the bloodhound on your trail," said Carluccio, an uneasy, half-terrified smile lighting up his innocent features. "Povero me! You pardon me? What can I do?"

"Tell him, then. I shall be gone long before the month is out. In that space he can do me no mischief."

So I concluded; and so we went our ways. I would not retreat in disorder. Still I insisted that it should be with drums beating and colors flying. But an uneasy feeling remained, which I can only compare to that of a man, uncertain whether he shall get away from the room where he is shut in, yet lingering spellbound until he hears the key turn in the lock, the bolt shot irrevocably from outside.

When, after many days, I could resume this journal, the key was turned.

CHAPTER XIII

MY CONFESSION

I AM sending what I have written hitherto of Tiberio Sforza, where it yet may avail to save—or else to bring him down with his victims. So I put these scattered sheets in order, and tell the tale right on from my thrice-unhappy resolution to see Roccaforte once more; yes, and its white angel too; for I recognize the charm that drew me mightily, deep down in my heart. I throw on paper this record of all that befell, then seal it and send it away. Death hangs over the House of Sorelli. I write while the moments rush, their wings audible in my hearing. My pulse is on fire; a sudden vibration takes the air; a cloud falls between me and the page I am blackening. In forty-eight hours I go on the forlorn hope. To return, how? Dead, shattered in pieces, or saving and saved? This shall be my witness that I was innocent.

Among these disconnected fragments that I stitch swiftly together, as the cobbler in the Arabian tale stitched the four quarters of Cassim the unlucky, I light upon a description of my first journeyings with Gaetano. We had met again like brothers. For he, with his large fair sense of things, was more Greek than modern, capable of heroic comradeship, awakening April in the heart.

This I say when all is over—when such a tide of

passion has rolled between. To my story. We met, our eyes told how delightedly; we threw wide the doors of conversation; we exchanged philosophies, or rather, it appeared to me that Gaetano, pitying the wasted multitudes, had yet in his aspirations some glamor of the romantic Middle Age; he would raise them that were down by a new and better feudalism, in which the glorious old houses of Italy should be captains and leaders again. He was drunk with the pride of history. But I, though belonging to a lower class, had once, at Oxford, been caught in the same delusion; I had gone through it, and behold, it was a dream. In his vision there was banqueting at festal boards, and the wine ran; not so in the gray day of realities. To my hardier view, which I shared with the wisest on both sides,—with the black troop that refused to advance and the crimson that made ready for battle—the feudal system lay buried beyond hope of resurrection. Still, I did not fling back the cup that Gaetano held out to me; how could I be so unmannerly, and toward him? But, setting it down untasted, I proposed that we should travel; were it only a few miles in the valley of the Sacco, over his father's lands, or up into the Sabine Hills, and on the edge of the Roman Campagna, that I might learn how the people existed, and whether any change could be wrought by the nobles themselves.

We rode up and down some ten days. The wild mountains, even in the lap of winter, kept their lovely green forests; at a distance many a village, high perched, or nestling under woods, with its melodious name, made an instantaneous picture; but when we climbed up thither, the enchantment was gone. Houses vile and mean, windows without glass, floors of polluted earth, chimneys yawning to the sky, with a few embers gasping out their last breath. And men, women, chil-

dren, specters in their rags or their nakedness—hungry, chill, fever-bitten, listless, dying by slow famine, which seemed to work upon them as it were opium, dulling their five wits. At Canterano, a village built of stone, not far from Subiaco, we stopped one forenoon to lunch under a smoky roof, in a hovel fit for cave-dwellers. Never shall I forget the cry of dismay that broke out, when I threw to one of the dogs behind us a fragment of the tasteless polenta, which neither Gaetano nor I could get down.

“Ah, vedi, Signor buono,” exclaimed with tears a haggard creature, whose hair fell about her in disorder, “Vedi, la prego,” and she ran with outstretched hand to intercept the morsel, “you give the dogs our bread, but we have none for ourselves. Why so cruel?”

I did not mean to be cruel; it was want of reflection, and a sudden disgust at the sight of food so loathly. When, to make amends, I gave the poor creature a one lira note, she fell on her knees and kissed it repeatedly; no saint’s relic could have called forth a more lively devotion. No, I never shall lose the memory of Canterano. There was a sprinkling of snow on the hills; the day was keen with tramontana, and the lights clear as in an icy landscape. And within these massive hovels, or on the rugged ascent of the steep street, lay Hunger and Fever clinging in a close embrace, their gaunt figures emblematic of the country that stretched before us in desolation unspeakable, away to the gates of Rome.

“You need not be so indignant with the great land-owners of the present day,” said Hagedorn to me, on our return, as I waxed eloquent in my denunciations. “I admit all you say, and more. Had you gone farther up the mountains, as I have done any time these thirty years, or down toward Foggia, or as far as

the grand hill scenery of Aspromonte, you, Signor Arden, would have no speech left in you. Everywhere it is the same story. The people are gangs of slaves, driven to work by an overseer who is the right hand of the middleman, himself the screw of the absentee or indolent landlord. You English would not lodge your swine—hardly, indeed, your lowest class of peasants, treated often worse than swine, as I have myself noticed—in the capanne, the wretched huts, where one half of the Italian nation finds its home.”

“What then?” I broke in, “is it unchangeable?”

“Do you think it began yesterday?” he answered. “It is as old as the hills. These bond-slaves are descendants of robber-tribes, Marsians, Volscians, Samnites, who shared the booty, at first, with their chiefs, but were insensibly tamed and brought low, until the last spark of heroism in them—I mean brigandage—is on the point of expiring. I am aware that our beloved Gaetano wants to make them right good soldiers again, feed them up, and lead them into battle. *À la bonne heure!* Let him try. The philosopher, like myself, will get them to exchange gold for paper, by selling to him Etruscan ornaments such as these. Look at them! You won’t? Well, I have always declared that social reformers will ruin art and sacrifice esthetics to their impossible economy.”

Hagedorn, therefore, was at the castle, laden with spoils, I do not say stolen, but transferred reluctantly to him by peasant women, who sold their last heirlooms with more grief than some fine ladies feel on making merchandise of their virtue. The Marchese di Lucera was expected. And beyond three or four days, however I might linger out the time, my departure could not be put off.

Could it not? A certain morning broke, destined to fulfil the Lucretian lines which tell us that every day

brings to some one its killing sorrow. I had gone out, along by the cypresses not far from which Renzo Fava lay in his long home. The hill descended by broad lapses of pasture, fringed with chestnuts, into the ravines and valleys that went rolling forward till the plain of the Sacco divided them from other hills and woods. So balmy an air touched one's forehead that May itself seemed to be roaming through the land; a screen of light silvery clouds hid the sun, curiously veined in places with sapphire and burnished gold. I was not unhappy, though still warm with anger and compassion at all I had been reviewing of the world's intolerable disease. It is possible that I felt more keenly than I knew. At all events, as I moved across the hill, I chanced to observe a couple of lads seated on the ground together, watching their herds of goats, and laughing and talking with the instinctive mimicry that gives to children's ways in these countries an appearance at once lively and theatrical, as though marionetti of a larger growth. I had seen the lads before. Now I went close up to them and asked their names. It took some little while to arrive at an understanding; but I was getting used to the varieties of Italian patois.

"I am Tadoro Quaglia," said the elder boy, who had the large make and healthy sunburnt hue of Michael Angelo's heavenly children—nothing fairy-like or visionary at all, but a solid palpable flesh, and a square head, with eyes that held no shame in them, yet were not impertinent. "I can guide you best of any ragazzo in the paese to the ruined city. Now is a good time, the corn was carried ever so long ago, the vines are stripped, the grass is not high. Signore, shall I take you to Ninfa? I know the short cuts. To Ninfa, Signore?"

"Not this morning; it is too late. But what is this little boy's name?" said I, turning to the younger one.

If Tadoro was robust, he was likewise clean. His companion, pale and fragile, with dull black eyes, had no more signs of the bath upon him than had his dancing kids, which were evidently pets and associates, taken into the family on a common footing. He spoke with an infantine chirrup.

"They call me Giovanni Greco," he answered hopefully. "Signore, give me a little soldino!" The unwashed hand was out.

I shook my finger. "No, Giovanni, you must n't be a mendicant." At which he laughed as at a good joke.

"But all the world is a mendicant," cried this juvenile philosopher. And Tadoro, by way of exemplifying another doctrine, the fruits to the toilers, echoed his original proposition.

"Signore, we will take you all the way to Ninfa; then you give us both soldini!"

They continued wrangling about me, as in a ritornello chattered by hungry starlings, and I continued to stir them up by fresh denials. Then two other children, much younger than these, appeared out of the chestnut-wood, hand in hand. As soon as they saw the little goatherds they ran forward, too, expecting soldini from the stranger. A boy of perhaps five, a girl of three; neither clean, in dismal rags, and with bare feet. I thought them pretty. They asked an alms without losing one moment; putting out their tiny hands in silence. "And these bimbi, who are they?" I inquired of Tadoro, constituted by age and eloquence the orator of the party. His answer came in a flash.

"They belong to Nonna Candia, the vecchiarella whose son was knifed by the brigands. Renzaccio's children, these are."

I saw it in their faces. The dead man, lying on his bier, had offered me such a semblance of peace and purity, quiet in the shadow of eternal stillness. But

his children had even now taken my hand, one on each side, with a manifest belief—which so many other children had delighted me by showing—in my affection for bimbi of their age. I was held a prisoner; without roughly shaking them off—striking, as it were, a blow at the dead—I could not get free of them. My veins tingled. “You must let me go, or how can I give you anything?” I said at last, smiling with more pain than I had ever yet experienced. They loosed my hands then, but stood close, in mute expectation, the girl holding my coat with her baby fingers to make sure I should not run away. I did not dare to call them, as one is used in speaking to Italian children, by any tender name; it would have died in my throat.

“What are they doing here, at the Rocca? Why not in Cartena with their mother and her people?” I asked of Tadoro.

He shrugged his broad shoulders, “La mama is dead of fever. Behold why! They have only Nonna Candia.”

“But how long dead? Before—before what happened to Renzo? Say it was before then.” I found myself praying to Fortune in this lad’s shape, imploring some mitigation of the horrors which were crowding upon me.

“But no; for Giovanni Greco and I saw him laid out; that was long ago. The mama died, it is not three weeks. She took fever”—la frebbe the lad pronounced it—“when he was knifed by the brigands. Now the bimbi come to their nonna.”

It was too certain. I had another death to expiate; the stain of blood was spreading by a law of its own, and where in the deep waters of life would it be lost?

My soul fainted within me. But the touch of these children, clasping my hands again, woke me to the dreadful present.

"Why do you say brigands did it?" was the question that I put once more. "Did you see them?" And suddenly I remembered that these were the very lads whom Nonna Candia had mentioned in my hearing to Ser Angelo as having witnessed the evening scene, when Renzo was brought to her threshold.

Tadoro replied cautiously, "Who knows? But Vanni and I were in the street playing *mora*; and three men, with their faces covered, came up the hill carrying Renzo between their hands. They let him fall—thump, like that—on the stones; and away with them. They would be brigands; why else should they put on false noses?"

"You can't guess who they were? Nor in what direction they fled? Can *you*, Giovanni Greco?"

"We were playing *mora*; I could not tell you," said the imperturbable Giovanni, his fingers beginning to move unconsciously to the tricks of the game.

Tadoro subjoined this striking piece of information, "Signore, when you see brigands, you never see them; they run away."

But the boy and girl at my side were peeping into certain pockets of mine just within their reach. I must hold their hands, smile at them, look gravely into the large bright eyes—wondering how much they took in of Tadoro's narrative. Not a great deal, I thought. The girl was intent upon a swarm of midges that danced up and down in the sun. What of her brother? His features were gradually hardening out of the vague into a distinct and remarkable expression. He let go my hand, put his own together solemnly, and said, with an eye upon the other two lads, in his slow, childish staccato, "When I am a man, I will kill the man that killed my father."

"Bravo, little Lupo," cried Tadoro, "kill him, I say. But what will Bice do?"

Bice was at that moment putting up her innocent lips to be kissed by me. She had taken for granted that I was her friend and admirer. I laughed a somewhat bitter laugh. "Here are the soldini," I exclaimed, unclasping her from my arms. "How many for each of you? And what are you going to buy with them? Maccaroni?"

"Eh, maccaroni for us!" laughed Giovanni, when he had pocketed the coins. "Maccaroni is for princes. I shall buy a plate of polenta."

Before I had finished my almsgiving, a girl in the plain walking-dress, which gave her something of a nun-like severity, was seen coming up the rugged path, through the olive-yards, which ascended to the Rocca from the shrine called *la Madonna delle Grazie*—Our Lady of Grace. No sooner had Lupo and Bice caught sight of her in the distance, than, holding their coppers with clenched fists, they ran down the steep, shrieking excitedly, "*Principessa, behold, behold! Money!*"

In their haste the little girl was on the point of stumbling, when Donna Costanza, running to her with outstretched arms, took her up and kissed her. Lupo held the lady's dress tight, and would not let her go. Thus she came on, grave but tender-looking, with such an air and gesture as *La Carità* wears in Sir Joshua's refined allegory, well-known to me from my Oxford days, when I glanced up often toward it in the painted windows of New College chapel. But there was a difference here. A flame of pensive devotion had touched the living girl's cheek. What would I not have given—some pure and perfect chrysolite, big as the world—to learn the subject of those prayers which she had been putting up to Our Lady of Grace at the shrine below?

I think Costanza in her maiden meditations would have passed on, just smiling as she went; but the chil-

dren clung about her, and perhaps in my burning eyes and brow she conjectured some trouble which would not be wholly subdued. If I looked as I felt, she must have seen how wretched I was. The air became oppressive; there seemed not enough to breathe; and one dead face grew multiplied every time these poor babes stirred in their playful dance round the girl's steps—for now Bice was chasing Lupo, and the lad, not an atom daunted, made Costanza pretend to shelter him. I do not say they were unhappy. But their bare feet and filthy accoutrements declared them to be among the miserable. Against their ill-famed Nonna Candia my wrath was kindled in a degree that I recognized as absurd. Was it Candia that had taken from them father and mother?

Yet I could not help saying to the Princess, "Pity the little ones are not clean, Signorina! How do you dare to touch them?" For I remarked on her cloak a stain of green mud left by the child's rags when she was folded in Costanza's arms.

"You have touched them yourself, Ser Ardente," she replied, smiling. "Were they not holding you by both hands before I came? Ah, it is true, Candia should not let them wander so. Where are your nice clothes, Lupo, that were bought for you?"

Lupo gazed all abroad with some faint notion, I dare say, that if he looked long enough the clothes would drop on him out of the invisible. But no marvel answering his expectations, he breathed hard, and threw himself into an attitude of despair. "Don't know. Ask nonna," said he, "Lupo, all rags—Bice, all rags. Signora, I am very hungry. We found no chestnuts in the woods. Did we, Bice?"

"I hungry, too," said Bice, "always hungry. No—no chestnuts," making a desperate effort to give "castagne" its full sound.

"Poverelli, they have only old Candia now," said the Princess, "but we gave them their little things to put on. She keeps them for the Festas, no doubt."

They went on murmuring, each child for itself in a half-dream, "Ho fame, gran fame"—a sing-song as of young birds cheeping in the hedge on a bitter cold day. It was a lesson they had learned—no more, I said to myself; but yet their pale, pinched features, faintly rose about the lips, very white on the temples, had the fever of death upon them.

"Can these bimbi live?" I whispered to Costanza.

"Live?" she answered absently, "it shall be as God pleases. No, my brother says orphans die young. I have noticed it, too. Besides, there is Pasquale with his bad breath in the house; they all sleep in one room. Well, the Madonna will take them to Paradise."

Ah, it was greater than I could bear—this burden! "Run," I exclaimed, pushing Lupo by the shoulder, "run and get food for yourself and Bice. Here is more money. If they ask where you got it, say the Signor Inglese gave it you! Away now"—and I made him set off up the hill to Roccaforte.

Costanza would have followed, but I implored her by a sign to remain. She was observing me anxiously, struck by the tone in which I had spoken and by my disordered appearance. "You are not well," she said gently; "perhaps you feel the misery of our poor people more than we who are used to it. I hear you talking of it with Gaetano passionately. Then, my heart burns too," she concluded in her kind voice.

"I feel it, yes, day and night I feel it, Signora. The imagination of all that suffering has been with me, as though I alone saw it, and were too poor to lessen it by one single throb, for years together. At Oxford, in that inclosed garden of ours, where its echo seldom pierces; at home, beyond my father's gates; in London,

an Inferno which ten thousand poets could not exhaust of its terrific pains and tragedies, though they dipped their colors in the burning lake; in America, the land which was to have proved a morning-world of freedom, manly toil, and happiness. Last of all, here I come, to this ancient home of things great and beautiful; but there is no change, no relief. How can I help the desolate feeling that darkens all the sun for me? But there is my own trouble, too—will you let me tell it you? Come into the cemetery, beneath those cypresses, to Renzo Fava's grave. I will tell you there; else, I think—don't be afraid, Signora—but I see you have no fear of me. Oh, that is right, so right! Unless I open my heart, I shall surely do myself some violence."

Before I had begun to pour out these rapid words, the other two children had gone away with their goats into a shadier spot. The sun was high and glared down upon us; and I was standing with bare head under its rays. Costanza motioned me to be covered. She had a strong will, as I knew; and her habit of prayer served to keep down or obliterate those small movements and hasty expressions that most women under circumstances so novel would have fallen into. The cemetery, though lonesome even in broad day, was not far from the public road. Any one passing by could perceive the whole extent of it inside its low walls. Costanza glanced at me a second time; her lips moved in a silent prayer; then she beckoned, and I went slowly on in her footsteps, until we took our place, almost in the guise of mourners, by the level green sods, above which rose an iron cross without name or inscription, a dried crown of immortelles wreathing it sadly. Renzaccio lay there.

"Why do you bring me to this grave?" asked Costanza. "Do you feel so much for the unhappy victim?"

I gave a deep sigh—the heart was overfraught within me. "My victim, Signora—it was I that killed him."

I stooped and touched the Cross, making it bear witness of the truth I was uttering.

But to her a confession so abrupt, unexpected, and without proof, could convey only the dreadful hint that my reason was suddenly overthrown. She quivered as at a blow, yet nothing ever beat down her courage or swept away her self-control. How should one answer a madman? She was considering that.

"You are not well, Signor. Let us leave this gloomy scene; tell me all about it when we reach the castle—or stay," a better thought striking her, "will you not call upon Don Antonio? It is only a few minutes to his house. Unfold your trouble to him; he will be a father to you. What can I do—a girl like me?"

"No, Signora, don't leave me yet," I cried, almost out of myself, while the great anguish covered my brow with drops of sweat. "Don Antonio is a priest, and I am not of his religion. I cannot go to him. But you, oh you!—a woman's heart—you will take pity, you will keep my secret as closely as he; you must not think me mad, unless, indeed, this crime or calamity, heaping trouble on trouble, misfortune on misfortune, should sear and blast me into wildness. I—I it was, and no other—that struck Renzo down. He died by this hand, which ever since has appeared crimson in my sight. Good God, but the worst would have befallen if I made my guilt known to you and you would not believe me."

I saw she was still apprehensive that my mind had given way; still unconvinced, but never a whit frightened. Her eyes were fixed in mildness and compassion upon mine. Then I quieted a little from my vehemence, swallowed down that fit which was choking me, and in broken but sober words went through the story of Renzo's encounter with Carluccio and my fatal intervention. I kept the name of Tiberio dark, making

only the slightest allusion to him. Once I had begun the indictment of myself, Costanza listened with an air which satisfied me that she no longer thought a mad-man was before her.

"Now you know I am telling the truth," I said, as if it were a matter of rejoicing, "now you can grasp the motive which led me to go with you into Candia's hovel and find out who the man was that lay there dead; now you see why at the funeral there must be one as chief mourner who had never been invited. I, this fool of circumstance, that thought his fellow-man inviolable—that would not have even the murderer put to death; in whose eyes the shedding of blood was pollution—I am stained with murder; I have shed blood. And when I fancied that there was one victim alone, I must reckon now the mother and the children. What can I do in atonement? Tell me, you that are innocence and purity itself. I will do anything you bid me."

"Don Antonio would tell you best," she answered.

And when I signified again that I could not take him into my confidence; that having spoken once, I never would open my lips again to any mortal but her who had received it; that in her hands my fate was wrapped up; she answered, after a long pause, "You are much to be pitied, Signor Ardente. But is the blame so great?"

"It is great. When I struck the last blow, I meant something like murder. I gave place to the devil. In my blood there was a current of joy which overcame me and would not be resisted. That blow smote Renzo's life out of him. It made his wife a widow, his children as I saw them to-day."

"You punish yourself too fiercely," said the girl, "even if all that were true. Perhaps it is more fancy than truth after all. Do not be so harsh in judgment

of what you have done. It can be forgiven. What is there that cannot?"

"But atonement? I shall always now have Lupo and Bice in my mind—poor unconscious avengers, more dreadful to me with their babblings than the Furies. Can nothing be done for them?"

"Are you rich or poor, Signor?" she inquired, with the perfect simplicity of a messenger out of heaven, to whom our foolish distinctions are naught. "Donna Anastagia believes you own great properties in England; my father says you are the heir of a wealthy house. A rich man could have these children sent to school, taught how to earn their living. What would you propose?"

"My father is wealthy; but I am not. I do not mean to be. With my pen I could make enough to support them. Only, who would see to it? For my name must be kept hidden."

"Yes, if Nonna Candia were told all, she would—but how know I what she would do?" said Costanza, checking herself. Again, there was a long pause. "I can only hit upon this plan for the present," she resumed at last. "You will give me the money you have to spare. I will consult with Don Antonio. In some way the thing shall be done through me. Will that satisfy you? Will it make you feel happier?"

"God bless you, Donna Costanza," I said fervently. "I promise everything, even to feel less miserable under my burden, if I may hope for a word of comfort sometimes from you. Oh, I know what I am asking—too much indeed. But if you were a sister of charity, you would speak gentle words to the condemned, would n't you? I am condemned. You must speak to me."

Her eyes had that look in them which belonged to no world of ours. "I will do all I can for you, Signor Ardente," she said, holding out a hand which I dared

not clasp but touched reverently, as it had been a saint's. She knelt beside the grave, bowed her head in prayer, arose and left me.

When she had gone a long while, as I reckoned minutes of such intense absorption, I looked up over the low walls and perceived that Lupo was sitting astride of the parapet, within no great distance, nursing Bice and putting sweets alternately into her mouth and his own. How long had he been here? Would he tell Nonna Candia that the Signor Inglese had been talking with the Princess at his father's grave? Some danger lightened from that darkness, away on the horizon. I could not attend to it in my mood. The child was very young, incapable of describing more than the bare fact. I let it drift with the future.

Before the day closed in, another streak of flame had leaped out from a different quarter of the sky. Thus far, I alone was threatened. But henceforth the House of Sorelli must lift itself against the storm I had called down upon its aged battlements. Let me say how it came on.

CHAPTER XIV

TEMPEST

RESTLESS, but not so troubled, after that Shining One had come down and spoken words of comfort to me—herself “*vestita di color di fiamma viva*,” bright with some unknown radiance fronting my dark—I had gone roaming toward the ruined Ninfa, through woodland paths. The hours brought on a transparent afternoon, much to my taste, its distances gleaming as if a frost of stars had fallen over marsh and meadow. I found sometimes a brilliant blue stretch of sea rise into view and sink again, clearing the mind like water flowing, in a way I never could explain but have often experienced. Toward dusk I was turning home to Roccaforte in a languid humor, hoping little, but dreading no fresh ambushade of the power that lurked on my road. And I passed up to the castle entrance, reading above it, as I was in the habit of doing, its *Æschylean* motto, “*Sangue lava sangue*.” A lady, large and fair, was pacing the courtyard. When she saw me, she hastened down, and holding in her right hand a letter which she waved triumphantly, the Signora Tarquinia laughed, and exclaimed, “For you, Ser Inglese! Behold, I am your *corriere di sera*; I bring you the evening post. How much reward?”

“I can’t say until I know the value of the contents,” was my careless answer. “Allow me to see them.” I

put out my hand; but Tarquinia drew back her own and held the packet high in the air.

"Nay, nay; guess what is inside, first. You should be able to guess. A message of love or war? Romance of the purest water, certainly. For how think you it came into my hands? Un biglietto, eccolo quà," she sang, with dainty steps dancing back to the center of the courtyard. I must pursue the actress, teasing me in her good-humored drolleries, which at that moment I could have dispensed with.

"But how did you come by a letter of mine?" I asked, while she danced further away out of reach. "Did you steal it, Signora, from the porter's lodge?"

"Steal it, indeed? Am I Rosina? Know then, Ser Cavalier, I was taking a turn on these villainous rugged roads, and came, I cannot tell how, into a clearing of the wood over there, when all at once a lad, a forester, pretty but pale, with large pink eyes, emerged—that is our stage expression and an apt one—from a clump of evergreen oaks. He, this pretty lad—but I am not sure, after all, that he *was* pretty—taking rather—had on a rich green suit, trimmed with silver tags and laces, and wore a tuft of peacock's plume, for all the world like a little bersagliere. Do you recognize Love's page? He looked so, I assure you."

"A stranger to me," I answered. "Pray go on. What did this Rosalind say?"

"Ah, you agree with my suspicion. Rosalind—yes, faith, it might have been! But then you would be aware of this booted and belted damsel, for, as I was saying, she, or he, wore the most coquettish and ravishing stivaletti, and a belt with braids and tassels hanging down. Where is my sentence gone to now, I wonder! Begin again, Madame Tarquinia. If it was Rosalind, I say, you have read the billet before you open it. For lovers write their foolish no meaning in single phrases,

'I adore you—I hate you—come to me—go to the devil'; or if at greater length such as this, 'Perjured one, behold, I die.' But does your Rosalind live in the forest?"

I was getting impatient. "Did the messenger, as you call him, speak no word at all? Please, my letter!"

"Rosalind—if it were not Tasso's Erminia—" replied the tantalizing comedienne, "glided upon me out of the brake, stood still and doffed her plumes, with an air the most polished you ever saw, and said, not without a youth's impertinence in her small voice, 'I have the honor of speaking to the divine Tarquinia.' I could have boxed her ears. But I answered mildly, 'You have that honor; what follows?' Whereunto, the plumes bowed again; this letter was produced from the bosom of the green jacket; and her sauciness replied, 'Favor me by giving that with your own beautiful hand'—a hand that was very near slapping the page's cheek, Signor mio, and you would have pardoned me!—'with your own beautiful hand, to the English Sir that is staying at Prince Sorelli's.' I took the letter mechanically, and was turning it over to read the address, when I lifted my eyes, and lo, the forester was gone. I ran, though I greatly dislike running, Sir Inglese, to this side and that of the clump of evergreens. But—nothing! Rosalind, the vixen, had got to earth; and here is your biglietto d'amore."

With those words she advanced, made a sweeping curtsy in the grand style, and dropped the letter into my hand. It had no address. I hesitated. "You are sure it is for me, Signora Tarquinia?"

She threw up eyes and hands. "For whom else can it be, I ask you? Is there a second Englishman at Roccaforte?"

That appeared to be decisive. Accordingly, I broke

the seal, and while Tarquinia stood by with an appearance of relishing all this immensely, drew forth, not a perfumed billet, but a square, thick paper, scrabbled upon in a tremulous Italian hand. The first lines perplexed me; then I fathomed their intention; and showing, I do not doubt, a very swarthy countenance to the actress, I crumpled up the whole, saying, "Signora, you are mistaken; this is not a love-message." Uncertain what next to do, but reluctant to enter until I had read every line of the document thus discharged at me, I muttered, "Scusi, Signora," and went down the path by which I had come up. The trees standing near had lost their leaves. I could still decipher this writing in the twilight, and there I paused.

It was an educated style, after a fashion. Calm and respectful, the writer, with many flourishes of "Eccellenza," and so forth, begged pardon that he should incommode a stranger touring in the loveliest and most unhappy of European lands. But times were evil, poor fathers of families starving, the winter harsh, and I could do a world of kindness to many, if I would. The request, a simple one, was that my lordship would be pleased to lay this candid epistle before Don Gaetano—my client shrank from disturbing the repose of his father, the Duke—and persuade him, if he would be so charitable, to forward a sum of ten thousand lire by the bearer to those hunger-bitten households. The bearer had commands, in fact, to return, in the name of humanity, within seven days. He might be found, on giving certain signals, in the woods about Roccaforte, and if the money were left on a great stone, called *Il Sasso del Diavolo*, near the clump of evergreens where he had encountered the Signora Tarquinia, the best use would be made of it; while I, the Englishman, as well as Don Gaetano, should earn everlasting gratitude. Only one person, unarmed, might approach the De-

mon's Boulder—myself if I chose. Meanwhile, the Prince and all of us were bidden to have no fear and “star tranquilli.” It was a good work; therefore to be done, as the gospel said, without the right hand letting the left know of it. My correspondent would make bold enough to add, *con permesso*, that this beneficence was under the distinguished patronage of the Conte di Santa Fiora.

The letter dropped from my hand, the scales from my eyes. Tiberio had done this thing. I could hear his mellifluous mocking in the rounded sentences, nor did I question that the concluding sneer and gospel reference were due to him. But he was thrusting on Santa Fiora from behind the screen; for what purpose, exactly? To get these ten thousand? There was more in it. He had requested me to introduce him within the walls of Roccaforte; on my refusal, behold the blackmailer stood at the doors. I began vaguely to perceive some large design of which these things were the prologue. I was to be pushed forward, like a pawn over the board, in a game that Tiberio would be playing for his own hand.

Seven days' respite. Should I pack up bag and baggage, leave the letter to its chance, and have done with Roccaforte? The two children, Lupo and Bice, rose before me at that instant like shapes in the night, following the dead body of their mother to Renzo's grave. Their little hands barred my way. I could not seek an interview with Costanza; it would have been against all custom, and impossible; accident alone could furnish the opportunity I wanted—and how soon? If I kept silence with Gaetano—but I knew this to be only the first of a number of attacks, which according to rule would succeed one another, becoming more and more violent, until arson and murder closed the account. Should I inform the police? They were not in Tiberio's

pay, or none except individuals. But the letter had ended significantly with a recommendation to be tranquil, which, in the well-known language of the Camorra, warned us against invoking the public authorities. Did I set them on, probably Gaetano would expiate my indiscretion with his life. I could see Santa Fiora, the human serpent, gliding under those green bushes making ready for a spring. On every side I was straitened. The old castle, where we sat that night in the Great Hall at dinner, seemed to me wrapped in lightning.

Tarquini, playful and on the surface a creature of impulse, had good judgment. One glance toward me on our way into the dining-room convinced her that she must not carry further the legend of the green-vested page in the woods of Roccaforte. She talked plays and operas all the evening with a disengaged accent for which inwardly I thanked her. Yet something I had to do, and that shortly. Whom could I take counsel with? I was absent in thought on this inquiry when I heard Hagedorn exclaim, "You tell me, Signora, that silence is golden. We say so in our German proverb. Nevertheless, take it from me that speech is diamond. When you have spoken, you can measure the good and harm of it. When you refuse to speak, you never know the consequences. My view is that three fourths of the mischief done in this world springs from silence. I have very little faith in it."

A hair will decide a trembling balance. No sooner was Hagedorn shut into his room for the night, than I knocked and entered. "You look serious, my friend," he said in English, offering me a chair. "What can I do for you?"

"You can advise me whether I shall speak or be silent," said I, handing him the letter; "read that."

He adjusted his spectacles, drew the lamp toward him, and went through the letter, line by line, a first,

second, and third time. "Sangue di Diana!" he cried at last—he was curious in his Italian oaths—"that is bad, very bad. Have you a notion where it comes from?"

The question was inevitable; yet how could I answer it? I was sick of the story of Renzo, sick of Tiberio and the hold he had got over me, sick unto nausea of the horrid situation. Would it be wise to open my hand, letting the last arrow fly? It might be wanted still.

"I have heard the name of Santa Fiora; is he not a capobanda in these parts?" I said.

Hagedorn laughed in his reflective way. "Santa Fiora is a name, a romance, possibly a myth. He floats in the air uncertain, without shape or consistency. From one month to another, some act of violence—firing the corn, killing or driving cattle, perhaps the abduction of a big farmer—testifies that brigandage is not wholly extinct. It is all put down to Santa Fiora. However, that is not my chief concern. This oily epistle means what it says. You can't guess who sent it? But how should you? It is precisely because you are a foreigner that the rascals have put you in commission."

"But what shall we do? I am utterly against playing this part with Don Gaetano. Would my leaving at once for England spoil their plans?" I was on thorns while he considered his answer.

"No, I don't think it would mend matters," he said; "they are aiming at the Prince, not at you. To leave him without warning would only shorten the time of defense. Gaetano is a man of mettle, not perhaps so prudent and slow as we old fellows should like him to be. Tell Gaetano. I can advise nothing better. Speak, and we will consult how to take these marauders in their own trap."

It was a weight off my mind. I thanked Hagedorn, went to my room, which had always been the same from my first arrival, and spent the long hours until dawn in staring at the scene over my head of Ajax in silver armor, dragging into captivity the mad Cassandra. Sleep would never come near me; but in a dreamy state, my imagination, taking up the story of that insane bride of Apollo, lured me on from the burning city of Troy to the gaunt and shadowy palace at Mycenæ, with the shrieking woman at its doors, her arms outspread, her hair streaming along the wind, while she roused up the ghosts of murdered children, or foretold, as if it were this instant being acted, the slaughter of Agamemnon in the bath. All these portents I mixed confusedly together, and saw or heard them with a peculiar and inward sense, which affected me like a new-born thing, shudderingly aware of the future.

But in omens from the past there was no guidance. Cassandra might shriek; all was in vain. Next morning I lay in ambush to speak with Gaetano when Hagedorn should be near to help me. The young Prince had intended to ride down as far as the Casino, from which we had started on our memorable fox-hunt. I begged him to give me a few minutes. We entered the room that had long ago served as a library, but now was tenanted only by rats and rotting furniture. There we could converse without being overheard.

Before handing him Santa Fiora's epistle, I tried, as well as might be, to apologize for letting him see it at all. But I was a stranger to the ways of the people, and I had taken Hagedorn's advice; moreover, I added, with an emotion that no resolve could prevent from shaking me, "If there is danger, Prince, I entreat you to give me a share in it. For you and yours I am willing, I should be overjoyed, to face the extremest perils. You will believe that, Don Gaetano?"

He grasped my hand, took the letter, and read it as carefully as Hagedorn had done the night previously. But a great flush mantled his features from brow to chin. His lip trembled.

"You did well to show me this infamous document," he said hoarsely, "the damned villains! Do they think the Sorelli are dogs, and that I—I—am a minchione? By God's body, they shall know different! Where is Hagedorn? Where is Ser Angelo? We will smoke the vermin out of their holes, and chase them into the Mediterranean before three days are over."

He was leaving the room with a passionate stride, not minding me under this intolerable affront. I motioned him to hear me.

"Well," he said, "what do you counsel? Pardon me, my dear friend, I know now the depth to which poverty has brought our house. In other days, no brigand, were he fifty times a Santa Fiora, would have dared to ask of us blackmail. We will hunt them, I tell you, Signor, to the death."

"They deserve no less. But call in Hagedorn. He will have knowledge equaled by no other man among your friends, Sir Prince. There is abundance of time."

He gave an impatient "Yes."

I found the German philosopher smoking in the courtyard, and brought him in. He saw the letter in Gaetano's hand, and glanced at me, a world of warning in his eyes. The Prince's flushed and wrathful countenance had arrested his observation. The latter was striding up and down, slashing his boot with his riding-whip, and showing every token of rage bent upon immediate action.

"What will your Highness do?" said the Teuton, with a formal deference which was rare in him.

"Do? Why, summon all the men in the castle and on the nearest farm; put them under severe examina-

tion; learn where these cutthroats are lurking, and give them chase. Have you seen Ser Angelo lately? I shall want him, to begin with."

"My dear Prince," said the elder man affectionately, "you will bear with me, I am sure. Examine the men, if you so decide; but take them apart; tell nobody what has led you to this proceeding; and get Ser Angelo to have the forest explored in a quiet way."

"And if all that ends in nothing—" cried Gaetano.

"Send the money on the day appointed, but take care to have all the mule-paths guarded by carabinieri—"

"By what?" thundered the young man, in a voice I had never heard before from his lips. "By Sardinian police? Hagedorn, do you remember that you are addressing a Sorelli—one of a Papal house—one that has never owned, never will own, this government of lawyers and scoundrels? One that counts among the glories of his kindred two Popes, lying in their marble shrouds at Ara Cœli? Do you remember that Innocent III was our cousin? You ask me to call in the Piedmontese that Roccaforte may sleep in peace? Madonna Santissima!"

He could not utter a syllable more, so strong was his agitation. We, looking on, kept our lips closed. There was an interval of minutes, during which all three were busied with reflections as unlike as they were absorbing.

Hagedorn spoke first. "If your Highness puts questions to the tenants, they will certainly be carried to Rome. There is only one way if you are resolved on preventing an official inquiry. It is to pay the money down, and watch."

"I will not pay a single baioccho; neither will I cringe to the Ministry—to Camillo, the renegade! Never. There are still a handful of the peasants I can

trust. With them, and a gun in my right hand, I will give an account of Santa Fiora."

"You mean, Prince, that you will shoot him?" said I, clasping the hand which he had stretched out in his excitement.

He wrung my own heartily. "What else?" he ejaculated with an energetic motion of the head backward, as if to fling a weight from him. "Suffer me to get within range of the insolent devil, and you will see."

"But the authorities will surely take note of such a—" murder, it was on my tongue's end to say, had I not before me Gaetano's blazing eyes. "Violence is violence; how do you propose to evade a public inquiry, when Santa Fiora meets with the fate he deserves?"

Gaetano replied scornfully, "I should like to see the Savoyards arraigning a Roman Prince for murder, all Europe looking on, the subject a brigand notorious for the corpses which he has left in his path! That challenge I would take as a godsend. Come, you gentlemen, let us find Ser Angelo." His hand was on the bolt when Hagedorn interposed again.

"From Angelo you are not likely to learn much," he said. "I know a more excellent way. Allow me to be your scout during twenty-four hours. If by this time to-morrow I have not nosed out the trail, call up a younger bloodhound. Ay, ay, Prince, you know me of old. Lascia far a me. It is the middle of winter; the wolves come down from the mountains where I have just been cheating the poor devils of paesani, exchanging brass for gold. I don't believe you will catch a single snout in the woods of Roccaforte next Wednesday; they are up to a deeper game, it strikes me. But high or low, some trace of them I shall scent. Now, I beg of you on my knees, not a word of this to any one. I must go about it my own way, like Reinecke Fuchs."

Unwillingly the Prince consented. His temper, at white heat, made him another man, sweeping away all gentler traits from the beautiful clear face, recalling there, as from forgotten deeps, the lineaments of the medieval or Renaissance chieftain, whose lips gave the law and whose sword acknowledged no superior. Had Santa Fiora been caught the next minute and hanged from the Castle of Sant' Angelo, even that would not have satisfied the honor of the Sorelli—Gaetano must himself wash out the insult in blood. Between him and me, while this evil spirit lay upon my friend, there seemed to be nothing in common.

CHAPTER XV

MONTE MAJELLA

IN twenty-four hours Hagedorn, who had been strolling all yesterday among his peasant acquaintance, brought us news, whence obtained he would not reveal. Santa Fiora had left traces of himself lately in the Roman Campagna. There were dark rumors of a stroke, an abduction, by which some wealthy person unknown had been held to ransom near the Tor de' Schiavi, on the Palestrina road, within three or four miles of the Porta San Giovanni. This would be the latest of a strange and perplexing series of accidents which, as Hagedorn declared, the police did not dare to investigate, though not unaware of them. For the circumstances pointed to a singular acquiescence on the part of the victims, and gave hints that the ground had better be left undisturbed. Hence the authorities had no mind to interfere. If the strong arm beat the brains out of Santa Fiora, they would let him lie where he fell. So much was probable.

On the other hand, in which direction to look for him? Not a man among the contadini would say. They knew nothing; had never set eyes on him. They sewed up their mouths when compromising questions were asked. One little goatherd, indeed—Hagedorn let slip his name; it was Tadoro Quaglia—had been told of a troop that rode two nights ago in the dark toward Alatri, act-

ing on which clew, our Teuton had gained the assurance that, if pursuit were begun, it must hold on by Sora and Solmona, or into the region of the Majella. "It is like Switzerland up there now," he concluded; "these rascals, who know every winding in the hills, may turn down again as we ascend. But that is our only chance. I tell you candidly, Prince, a poor one at the best."

"Su, su, corraggio!" exclaimed Gaetano, cheerfully. "Let us saddle and be off. You come, Signor Ar-dente?" with his courteous demeanor again. This intelligence had made him the Gaetano I knew previous to the threatening letter.

"Surely, Prince. It is my quarrel as much as yours."

"Then a fig for judge, juries, and carabinieri, and evviva la mano forte—the strong hand forever!" he cried as he went to give his orders. Nor can I deny that I was prepared to execute a little private murder on my own account. Santa Fiora was vermin; and Tiberio, had he ventured within pistol-shot, I could have brought down without compunction. Yet, such is the riddle of our nature, I still felt sorry when I thought of Renzaccio, nor did I hesitate in the resolution of which Donna Costanza held the secret, to bring up Lupo and Bice at my own charge.

We started, the four of us, Gaetano, Hagedorn, Ser Angelo, and myself, that forenoon, well armed, mounted on the sure-footed, wiry horses which alone are equal to these fatiguing and rock-strewn mountain tracks. No others were taken into our confidence; but we could never be sure that unseen eyes did not watch us while we scoured over the Valley of the Sacco, crossed the Cosa, and made for the Upper Liris and the Val di Roveto.

The weather was perfect, clear-eyed, with far distances. And, after Sora, in the atmosphere there was

a brilliant freshness, due to the snows above, on the high mountain-ranges that came into view, reach beyond reach, like the side-scenes of an enormous open-air stage. I had an intoxicating sensation of being carried along, the wind quickening every pulse, a spark seeming to keep alive within the brain, as of danger that would explode upon us before we knew. The moon rose early, so that, in spite of days still ending in the afternoon, we had some hours of light under which to prosecute our expedition.

We rode fast, though with frequent haltings, and on cross and irregular lines, for at every few miles it was incumbent on us to beat the oak and chestnut woods, and even the open fields in search of this human game. Our pretext was a shooting party that had left us behind; nor, considering the Prince's rank, as well as his wide friendships among the landed houses of the Abruzzi, was there any serious likelihood of our being stopped, wherever we broke bounds. But in consequence of the vague descriptions we offered, and seeing that we did not know the banditti by sight, we should have taken little by our meanderings, had I not casually suggested to Gaetano that I had in my mind a sort of typical brigand, whom he might inquire about. He listened attentively; and I gave him, as near as I dared venture, the portrait of my "human serpent," Santa Fiora. I laid especial stress upon his sugar-loaf head, long, snaky hair, and willowy person. Hagedorn was listening, too. When I had ended, the Teuton looked hard at me.

"Why did you call it a type? It is an individual you have drawn," he said, "and a remarkable one. I believe you have hit upon the very man. At any rate, such an outlaw was described to me, more than three years ago, in the neighborhood of Vasto d'Aimone, on the Adriatic. But he was wearing a different name. How did you come on so striking a resemblance?"

"Dreamed it, perhaps!" I laughed in answer. "You can but try it."

Gaetano did so; and only two or three trials were needed for so sharp an observer to satisfy himself that the herdsmen whom we rode up to had seen *this* Santa Fiora—of course we threw out no names—and that they stood in mortal dread of him. Had we appeared with an escort of military, we could not have terrified them to a greater degree. Nevertheless, perceiving that we wore no official badges and looked the mere shooting men which we professed ourselves, first one and then another dropped some little circumstance, indicating that the company had been somewhere about these mountains. We took heart of grace, separated occasionally the better to gain information, compared notes; and on the fourth day after our setting out on so pure a hazard, found ourselves riding between the Sangro and Monte Majella, certain that the band with their chief lay sheltered behind the precipitous rocks—in a ravine or a cavern—round which we were turning cautiously.

It was afternoon. In an hour the sun would be dipping at the back of the lofty hills behind us, among which Monte Rotella towered to its eight thousand feet. A wild and romantic scene; the mountains with their snows above bare fantastic stems that made a fretwork on their lower slopes, many dark evergreens interspersed, and a rich herbage, almost intolerably bright at this sunset hour, decorating the meadows which a multitude of streams, now swollen, kept fresh as in spring. We moved noiselessly over so thick a velvet, pausing at almost every other yard and sending long glances ahead, while, wherever possible, we held to the shade of rock or covert. No spot could be more lonely. Neither house was visible, nor herdsmen with his cows

or goats, nor traveler in any direction. But, as we came within a defile, beyond which the tufted crags appeared to open, we all stopped as at a signal from some unseen commander. A thin column of smoke, not mist, arose in the evening air. It was surely an encampment. We had come upon the enemy; now to take him by surprise.

Gaetano and I, dismounting, left our horses in charge of Ser Angelo and Hagedorn, who took them without a word. We two crept forward, each intent upon what he was doing, eyes peering on all sides, and hands smoothing a pathway up the rock nearest us, from which some view might be attainable into the opening on its farther side. As fortune would have it, I reached the summit first, dragging myself along the ground, but prepared at the moment of peril to shoot. It was an admirable position. The sort of clearing in front lay illuminated in strong level sunshine. A fire was burning there, as we had calculated, and round the fire stood, or reposed at half-length, in various idle attitudes, a dozen men and boys, their belts loosened, but every man with a gun at his right hand. They were eating their supper, talking in low tones, and quite at their ease. One among them sat on a heap of skins, in his hand a wine-flask which he was then lifting to his lips. I had a full view of the mean, dull features, and without hesitation recognized the human reptile, Santa Fiora, whom I had seen and shuddered at in the columbarium on the Via di San Sebastiano.

My companion saw him too, and was so amazed at the reality, which tallied with my fanciful portrait in every detail, that during some seconds he could neither think nor act. We knew, however, by previous arrangement, what our tactics should be. As we had come, so we glided back again, making no sound, until we

rejoined the other two. We were acquainted with the general features of the country, having carefully studied them as we rode along, and talked them over in our evening halts. There was no other opening into the valley on our side except the defile. On the other it fell away into a level of no great extent, but which we could not enter without being seen. We must charge from where we happened to be. It was our only opportunity; we resolved to take it. Riding two and two, still noiselessly, we came to where the branches parted. But in the leveling of our pieces, an eye from the camp saw something bright. A piercing cry followed, and we discharged our guns simultaneously, and leaped down into the clearing.

There was an awful confusion. The fire, trampled by a score of feet, sent up volumes of smoke, and would have darkened the scene but for the sunshine that struck through it. Our rifles sang once more; but the band, nimble as goats, leaving as many of their firearms as they had not instantly seized, were already scrambled into the tufted brake and brush, or, scampering up the tiny goat tracks, had thrown themselves down where it was impossible to single them out. Two men lay bleeding on the ground, who had fallen when we discharged our first shots. In an incredibly short time the valley had lost its tenants, the woods had swallowed them. But the most astonishing part of it was that neither from crag nor thicket did even a solitary shot answer to our repeated volleys.

We stood in the clearing, victorious and alone. Gaetano had ridden up to examine the wounded brigands. He was too late. Each had been shot through the heart. To all of us their faces were unknown. "Ahi, traditore!" exclaimed the Prince, between his teeth. "Santa Fiora—the majale, the great boar—has got off."

"We had better get off, too," cried Hagedorn;

"collect the arms, and let us make our way, without losing a moment, to the nearest village. We must take to the open."

That was good advice. Indeed, one felt that Gaetano's headlong manœuvres and disdain of the carabinieri, who would have captured the whole gang, had put himself and us into a position of extraordinary danger. "How came it that no shot was returned?" I asked of Hagedorn. We had picked up the rifles, and were now riding for our lives.

"They thought a detachment was upon them; their only chance lay in flight," said Hagedorn, panting a little, so that his answer came in gasps. "Besides, if the capobanda is really, as I suppose, the brigand described to me three years back, he is an arrant coward. He never will fight if it can be helped. But don't let us talk, for God's sake. Push on, friends, push on."

In obedience to this counsel, we were making fast toward the town of Lanciano, which lay at no great distance, when the Prince suddenly pulled up. "What are we doing?" he said, in his deep and impressive tones. "At Lanciano we shall be asked for the whole story. There will be an inquest on the bodies; our evidence will be required, and carabinieri sent from Rome to guard Roccaforte. Meanwhile, Santa Fiora has escaped."

We had reined in, following his example, and now we should have offered a conspicuous mark to the enemy in the open plain. But our halt did not last long. "Gentlemen," said Gaetano, with decision, "I am sorry to incommode you, but we shall not go to Lanciano. We will ride round by the mountain paths and get home without troubling the Piedmontese. Let them look after their own brigands."

We had no arguments to refute this special pleading. It was evident that the Prince would not enter Lanciano

with a prospect of legal inquiries before him; and, accordingly, we turned to the southwest, as the moon came sailing up the sky in her silver galley, and the waters of the Sangro gleamed like a long, blue sword flung carelessly across our path. By lonesome, enchanted woods, and by villages already asleep in their white raiment—often weather-stained, but glorious under these beams—we rode and rode, hardly once drawing rein until the light went out as of a quenched lamp, so that perforce we rested, not knowing the country in front of us. I call to mind now the high, untrodden snows, on which an intensely blue sky seemed to be lying, while the moon reigned; the strange silence of the woodland, still as though every tree, every leaf, were spellbound; the little streams, and plashets, and waterfalls, that made a tiny music, distinct in all that hush of greater things; and I wonder if any night has more completely taken me out of myself, or merged me in nature with a feeling so passive, yet so contented, while I fared on, not minding whither. In the pause of several hours, we took it in turn to sleep and to watch. But, for all that happened, we might have been on a lone island in the Pacific. And thus the morning found us.

That day, and the next, we continued our desultory rambling. Don Gaetano kept clear of the larger villages. We bivouacked in the purlieus of the ever-recurring woods, making a meal of provisions bought by Ser Angelo. And as the circle enlarged on which we were traveling, during those hours we had put sixty miles or more between ourselves and the two dead bodies lying in that nameless ravine. We talked little. I fell into continual day-dreams, after my wont, sometimes with a curiously pathetic desire to be near Donna Costanza, whose dove-like wings might shelter me from evils I dreaded, and anon resolutely steeping my heart

in this Nirvana, this opium of the fancy, which has ever afforded me relief. No one acquainted with Arden Massiter has impeached his courage; yet what am I? A thing of fears, presentiments, reveries—not the dream of a shade, but a shade that dreams. On the whole, I never wanted Roccaforte in my horizon again.

But the circle rounded into itself. The castle soared up to meet us, high and forbidding. We were at home after a journey that might prove unfortunate.

The day fixed for paying down our ransom to the ambiguous boy or girl page came and passed away without one of us approaching the clump of evergreens where Tarquinia had met that plummy apparition. Such was the Prince's command. Hagedorn thought a visit from Santa Fiora unlikely. "He will be keeping a month's mind of those two stricken youths," said the philosopher to me. "The peril from which he has only just escaped will be a lesson to him."

I was not so sure. On the stage I beheld another actor, invisible to my host and his friends. But the Ides of March were gone, and no Santa Fiora. Three days afterward, on my loitering about the piazza in front of the ugly old church—I was in hopes Dr. Mirtillo would come that way—the horrid witch Candia, after profuse apologies with hands and shoulders, drew close to me and begged a word. I followed her, since she desired it, into the filthy wynd where she lodged; but on the threshold of the house I stopped. "No farther," said I. "What do you want with me?"

She thrust into my hand a dirty packet of paper, making the horns, as before, with the fingers that were at liberty. She had been told to give me that. By whom? She did not know; a strange country lad, who made her a present of three baiocchi, to insure her delivering it, and then went off. Would I give her qualche cosa, as acknowledgment? Never did I loathe

her wrinkled face so utterly as during this voluble chatter, which might be all a lie for anything I knew.

I gave her a couple of small coins, and ran up hastily to the castle before venturing to open the packet. Ah, the same hand, superscription, and lickspittle style! The writer, he said, was grieved. No ten thousand lire for the many poor fathers of families; no answer at all. It was a misfortune, that. And yet who so high and mighty that misfortunes would not happen to them? The undersigned would weep tears of blood—*lagrime di sangue*—if anything of the sort befell the Duke or his family. Therefore, as I loved God, would I use my influence with Don Gaetano to leave fifteen thousand lire at the same place and with like precautions to-morrow? This was but a first letter of exchange. If honored, all would go well. If not—he left it to my good sense as a Christian to see that all did go well. And he was my most humble and so forth.

In taking this new demand to my obstinate but heroic friend I had no hesitation. There was not a minute to be lost. Don Gaetano read it without flinching. I saw in his eyes that he would not budge. "Thank you, Ser Ardente," he said, and tossed the note into the open desk at which he was seated.

"You will do nothing, Prince?"

"Nothing. You have expressed my intention."

"Not even put a watch round the castle?" I urged.

"It would be useless. Who can tell where they mean to strike?"

I left him in despair. The time appointed came. It passed over the dial as if it were any common hour of any day in the week. The winter sun set and rose again.

But hardly had it risen when a crowd of peasants came up with loud cries to the gates of Roccaforte. Ser Angelo went out to inquire the cause of the tumult.

And one of the Prince's chief huntsmen, who lived on the home farm, announced, with a scared countenance, that the villa had been burned down in the night, many head of cattle slaughtered, and the machinery destroyed by which the sluices were kept in order. The fields were flooded; the casino itself was a heap of smoking ashes.

BOOK III
TIBERIO SFORZA

CHAPTER XVI

THE LEGEND OF ROCCAFORTE

HAD lightning fallen from heaven and struck the castle, its inmates and the neighborhood could not have been in greater consternation. Here was no accident. Treachery had kindled the blaze, made a slaughter of the kine, and let the waters go free. Every man looked in his acquaintance face with mute but expressive inquiry and distrust. The carabinieri were coming up, at last, from Albano, Marino, and Frascati, as to the capture of the Sorelli fortress which had long held out, morally speaking, under the Papal and Guelfic standard. There was incessant rushing to and fro, without aim or object. The peasants gathered from all round the Pontine Marshes to see what had happened. But not one of them except the Duke's own men put a hand to restore the broken machinery; and those that ventured in among the beams and bricks of the casino, which smoked with the fury of a lime-kiln up to a late hour, did so in search of plunder. Indignation I observed on no solitary countenance; but fear was in all eyes, in the doubtful speech, and in the trembling of the limbs, ready at the first signal for flight.

In the castle, it seemed, every one of us had his marked fashion of rising to the calamity. The Duke, who had received no warning—nor did he guess the

reason of our expedition into the Abruzzi—was stupefied at an event to which he held not the most distant clue. “Brigands?—it must be so! But why attack me? And why never a word of ransom previously? God’s will be done!” And so he fell into the brooding silence habitual with him.

Gaetano said merely, “What is done cannot be undone. Let Uberto [the huntsman] stay here and give his account to the police when they arrive. I shall not help them in any way. When Lucera comes we will get up a hunting-party that shall not let Santa Fiora give them the slip. Till then, *pazienza!*”

But he was far from patient. I could not but observe how often his eyes rested upon me in a paroxysm of doubt and fury. Not that he suspected my share in what had come to pass—of course not; but I said to myself, “Were old Candia now, or the insolent Sismondo, to whisper in his ear that I was a jettatore, he would believe it, and think it a full explanation. For who but I in all this devil’s business, from first to last?”

Signora Tarquinia was frankly alarmed. “We shall be murdered in our beds; or carried off during the night,” she exclaimed on hearing the story. “This is only chapter one. You know the way of the banditti, Ser Inglese; they begin with burning or cattle-driving; they end with the rape of Helen of Troy. Can you men do nothing to protect us? I thought Roccaforte too high for these masnadieri. In the fine old days they would sooner have attacked a cardinal with his red hat than a prince with his red rapier. But what will you do? What is Don Gaetano bent upon?”

We had been talking, in broken snatches, with a nervous laughter shaking our words to fragments, at the high window from which—how many long weeks ago?—the Duke and his guests looked out on the Sicilians dancing by moonlight. The courtyard was

now full of people coming and going on various errands, a confused scene, with little meaning in it. "For in this crowd," resumed Tarquinia, speaking under her breath, "the very incendiaries may be giving themselves an air of infinite concern. We shall never know who did the outrages of last night."

"But can their repetition be hindered?" said Donna Costanza, joining us. "We ought to have no enemies in the country round. Have we not done all in our power to comfort the poor people?" She was manifestly pained, but rather because of the temper which these things intimated than by reason of the loss in worldly gear.

"Do you fear what Signora Tarquinia thinks may follow?" I asked her. "Is there among Italian brigands a Paris who would run off with Helen?"

Her quiet laugh was reassuring. "I have gone in and out among the villagers, and ridden from the Rocca to Terracina without escort many a time. If I fell into the hands of brigands, I should make them say the Rosary, talk to them of the Madonna—their mother and mine—and coax them until they let me go."

"You know which Madonna is their lady patroness?" inquired Tarquinia, shaking off her serious fancies. "It is as well you should, in case —"

"But I never heard," said Costanza, amused. "And so there is a Madonna of the Banditti? But where, then? She has very naughty children, *la poverella*!"

"Ah, where? At Naples, to be sure, where else? The Madonna del Carmine, you know. To her they make vows and light candles—perhaps they offer her some of the spoils; but I question whether brigands are generous. The romances told and sung about them are pure folly. But they do consider themselves clients of the Madonna del Carmine, I know that."

While they talked in this tone of a medieval mystery-play, I was, for the hundredth time, reciting another kind of rosary, which had only three beads, "Black-mail, arson, murder; murder, arson, blackmail." Two of these beads had slipped down the string. What of the third? Tiberio Sforza was not the man to draw back when he had put his hand to the bow and driven home a couple of deadly arrows. Could he be kept outside Roccaforte? Yes, with such consequences as the last fortnight had shown; and I looked at Donna Costanza's pensive features with a shiver, thinking how little prayers and the Madonna would avail, were she in that iron grip. Between Santa Fiora and Tiberio such a prize would surely be rent asunder; for which of them could ever yield her up? A second time I fixed my gaze upon her. Tarquinia, who observed me, was struck, and said in my ear, gravely, leaning forward, "*Troppo fiso*"—quoting the rebuke which lowered Dante's eyelids before his canonized mistress.

I made a negative sign. "Not so, Madam Tarquinia," was my answer, firmly given in an undertone; "I have learned my duty now." And I went on, "Will you please, not leaving this hall, draw away a little? I have a message for the Princess, which must be delivered in private. You pardon me?"

Tarquinia, still more astonished, went away to the next embrasure. The lady of Roccaforte had not caught our whispered words and was going too, but I detained her. "One moment, Donna Costanza. I am leaving the castle to-day. Business takes me into Rome. But, with your kind leave, I will present myself here again. Do not—do not be afraid of more mischief from the brigands. I hope—indeed I am certain—they have done their worst. All I desire to say—it is about the poor children—"

"Can you fulfil your intention, as you were saying

at Renzo's grave?" she asked, having apparently forgotten the peril from baditti under stress of her charitable impulses.

"I can, happily. The next time—" I hesitated. "When I am gone this afternoon, if you will pay the chapel here a visit"—I blushed as though confessing to her what I had seen that night with Hagedorn—"you will find, in the lap of the Pietà, close to the door, a purse. It is for them. Do take them away from Candia; she infects them with her looks."

"I will do all that is possible," answered Costanza; "the purse shall not be wasted. But do you, too, believe in the malocchio! I thought it was only a superstition of ours," she concluded, with an amused expression.

Yes, I had revenged myself unawares upon Candia by charging her with the demon-glance. What is more, she had it. I laughed, and said aloud to Tarquinia, "Signora, I am going; wish me a happy journey."

To Costanza I said no more. In my excited brain there was a feeling that she would be traveling with me unseen; that she must interpret my journey as the salvation of her House; for on what other terms could I be quitting them in a day of eclipse and terror? Nay, it was conceivable that, in my agitation, I had hinted too much.

First, then, I paid my visit to the dim and austere chapel. By an impulse, which perhaps needs apology rather than explanation, I kissed the extended palms of the dead Christ, laid my offering in his Mother's bosom, and strove thus to take with me the fragrance of Costanza's secret devotions. I left a note for Gaetano, to the effect that nothing but indispensable necessity would have called me away, but that, in a day or two, I hoped he would permit me to return, when the present trouble was not so heavy upon us all. I should have greatly

wished to share my confidence with Hagedorn; yet how could I while Tiberio wore his cloak of darkness? I was going to surrender into the hands of that miscreant, lest a worse thing should befall the Sorelli. His terms were sure to be high, if not exorbitant; among them, without doubt, silence on my part. Ah! had I not been purchasing security for Costanza, what a different man he would have found in me!

It was night when I arrived in Rome. I left my baggage at the station, strolled under the limes and the lamps, drank my cup of coffee in the mild, open air, and, sauntering at an easy pace, came to the tall mansion in which my Prince of Assassins abode. There was electric light on the stairs—a change from the old, murderous guet-apens which it had been any time these five hundred years. To my quiet challenge at the bell, a step answered, and a wicket in the door was opened. I saw through it the brown or purple eyes of Ascanio. His master was from home. When to return? Could not say; would I leave my message? I reflected, and thought I would do more, if possible. I said gently to Ascanio that he had seen me previously; that Tiberio was my friend; and if I might come inside, I would explain. No, he replied, his orders were positive, never to unlock the doors, or admit any one in his master's absence. "Good boy!" said I to him. "Keep the pass according to orders. I will come at nine in the morning. Here is my card, on which I have written 'Urgent.'"

I was there on the stroke of nine. Ascanio threw the door wide open. "The master is at his toilet; he will be down in a few minutes," said the lad, in his clear, agreeable tones, and with a pronounced Roman accent. He led me into the small dining-room, where he had begun to lay the table for an early breakfast.

As he moved hither and thither I had various occasions of studying his features. They were, I have already observed, pale to a singular degree of fairness, but finely drawn, and even beautiful, with an expression so childlike that I saw how it had misled me into supposing him almost an infant, whereas he was probably fifteen. His large eyes were pink, or a dark and changing purple, in which the light trembled. He wore one of those loose tunics which disguise the figure; and I could well imagine that, when he was arrayed in Robin Hood's green and carried a crest of plumes, Tarquinia, fresh from the operatic stage, might have thought him Rosalind. His charming treble would have rung saucily enough in a mock dialogue with Orlando. What, I said to myself—what was his history? To me a blank, and his formal silence indicated a resolve that a blank it should remain.

Tiberio entered, fresh from the bath, brilliant as a god in face and trappings, with his gorgeous Eastern dressing-gown, his taking smile, his pallor not diminished, his locks redolent of a subtle perfume. He gave me a warm hand. "Behold you, Sir Truant," he cried in his pleasant voice. "What good wind has blown you hither? Ascanio, breakfast."

And the boy, who had seemed to catch his breath on Tiberio's entrance, went up to him and kissed the hand which I had dropped.

"Tush, tush, these are Italian old-world courtesies," exclaimed his master, kindly enough, I thought. He smoothed, in a lingering way, the thick, yellow hair which Ascanio wore in curls, and gave him an affectionate glance. "Italy is the land of genius and passion," he continued, when the lad was gone out. "You English, excuse me, have neither. But something else you have which makes up for both—an iron will. And so you are in Rome once more."

I could not fence with the man. Let him be satirical now, when I was there to surrender. We were eating the same bread and salt—I, with an intention of loyal faith, so long as he would employ no base weapons; but he—until I had plumbed his secret purpose to the bottom, how did I know what he would be doing, once his foot was within the gate of Roccaforte? I resolved to play my next card.

"My stay in Rome will, I hope, depend on yours, Ser Tiberio," I said. And here, once for all, be it observed that when I write either his first or his second name, I did in fact make use of that by which he went in the world. To keep my narrative clear, I shall speak always of Tiberio Sforza.

"How is that?" he asked. "Let me help you to these tomatos sautés; you will find them delicious."

"I remember you were desirous of becoming acquainted with Don Gaetano Sorelli," said I.

He nodded. "Camillo's half-brother. Certainly I am anxious to know him."

"Well, I shall be going back to Roccaforte; if you will join me, I feel sure you may count upon a hearty welcome."

His eyes were steadily questioning mine. "A thousand thanks," he said lightly. "You are my very good friend, Signor Ardente."

"But," I resumed, and I was conscious of a dryness in my throat which no draught would loosen, "you will be more welcome still if you can employ your great influence—you were telling me the other day how great it is—with certain gentlemen who are in the habit of writing letters such as these to their friends in the country." With that I pulled out copies, which I had drawn in my own hand, of the two threatening letters forced upon Don Gaetano by my means.

Tiberio took them in silence, read their contents as

if quite new to him, and when he had done so, burst out laughing. "These are extraordinary bills of exchange, indeed!" he cried, wiping his eyes. "The first, I see, was not honored. How about the second?"

I put on as unconcerned a look as possible, and went over the story of yesterday morning. "Hum! your correspondents have no relish of a joke," he said, when I had finished. "They warn and they strike. But you were asking me, I think, to interpose. Mio caro Signore!" He lifted his hands and laughed again. "What do you take me for?"

I reminded him that he was, according to his own volunteered description, "King of the Camorra." I went further still. "Your influence, direct or indirect, with this Santa Fiora, I am certain, will be powerful enough to keep him quiet for the present. It is possible that when Don Gaetano has thrown open Roccaforte to you as a friend, some plan may be hit upon to get rid of the brigands altogether. What I ask now is, whether you will accompany me to the castle."

He was laughing still. "My dear sir," he said, "you have taken certain rhetorical boasts of mine at an exaggerated value. It is true I am not unknown to some of the Camorristi. I say nothing about Santa Fiora. But, since you and Don Gaetano make a friend of me, I will see what can be done."

"There is one stipulation," I said, on his falling into silence, which happened between us oftener than I have noted. "The Prince is not aware of your anarchist views. He will have to be told."

"Qu'à cela ne tienne!" said Tiberio, carelessly shrugging his shoulders. "I mean to tell him myself. Observe, Signor Ardente," he continued, with an expansive air, "the motives which lead me to accept this invitation are of the simplest. Don Gaetano is a notable power among the old Conservative Italians—Papalini,

Neri, and what not. They are much too feeble, indeed—with skimmed milk in their veins, not blood—much, I say, too broken for any enterprise of a revolutionary cast. But if the House of Savoy were tottering, they would bless the whirlwind that sent it down. They are in perpetual opposition; so are we. That is our interest in common. Let me only get speech of this fiery young man, I will answer for the rest.”

He was so frank and disengaged, that my suspicions would have slept, unless I had seen the real features gleaming through his semi-transparent mask. And he saw through my mask, too; he tasted a cruel pleasure in the terms which he was forcing on me. A villain! Yet I was in some degree relieved. The man’s enthusiasm, though selfish and bloody, might be genuine. I roused myself from these thoughts to say: “Well, then, I despatch a line this afternoon to Roccaforte, and we follow it up by our arrival to-morrow.”

“To-morrow,” he answered, with an ugly smile on his lips, “we will take the old castle by storm.”

It was done. Imagine now the strong walls of the Sorelli, girt round with mountains and wintry tempests—for the sky was full of unrest—as they held a mixed assemblage, Tiberio among them. When we passed through the enormous gateway, under a heaven which seemed to be of dull, flaming granite, so heavy and threatening were those clouds behind which the sun lay hidden, I marveled, in my superstitious way, that the armed hand, in the achievement above us, did not strike him down. Where was the raven that should croak this man’s fatal entrance under the battlements of Roccaforte? He came on what errand? I had written to Don Gaetano, dwelling on the importance of his becoming acquainted with the leaders of the youngest Italy, represented by this much-traveled politician. To Hage-

dorn I said more, though in guarded terms. My companion, I hinted, known to me from my earlier London days, was, or might be, the center of a far-flying web, in touch, perhaps, with some of the fantastic yet formidable associations that still honeycombed Italian life. There was no telling whether his simple presence at the Rocca would not scare these small banditti, on the principle of driving out fire by fire. Hence I was anxious to bring him with me.

Gaetano made him welcome. Hagedorn approved of my design. The carabinieri, sent up to us from the neighboring towns, lay about in our woods, or perambulated the mule-tracks, and made forays to Terracina in this direction, to Frosinone in that, but discovered no brigands. The land was profoundly quiet. In answer to all the demands of the police, Don Gaetano had shown himself civil but firmly elusive. They were not informed of Santa Fiora's letters; and possessing no clue to what had happened, they began to think of it as some private vendetta, into which it would be unprofitable to thrust their hands. I received no more petitions for money. The ashes of the casino lay there, by way of evidence that it had been burned down; else, in a few days, one's thoughts being so fixed on unknown but stealthily advancing dangers, I should have fancied the episode a dream.

My time in the castle was almost up. I had promised my London editor, with whom I stood in easy relations, to travel south during the next months, explore the daily life of Naples, visit the sulphur-mines in Sicily, take as near a view as I could get of the Mafia and its ramifications, especially in the Conca d'Oro—the Golden Shell—around Palermo, and help to scatter the Egyptian darkness in which our beloved countrymen were groping after a knowledge of the Italy they admired but had hardly seen. I was leaving the field to Tiberio.

His charming voice, and subtle courtesy, and strong but sincere language against the reigning system, had begun, as I saw, to exercise the influence I dreaded on Gaetano, and even on the Duke himself; who, though speaking little, was full of a sour indignation, made still more keen by the remembrance of his rebellious son, Camillo. What Costanza felt as regarded their latest visitor I had no means of guessing. A narrow escape from accident, however, in which the lady and I were both concerned, did throw some light upon her sentiments, confused but sinister. It happened thus:

I was leaving the next day, and until then neither Tiberio nor myself had been shown over the whole of the castle, perhaps because it was one of those pleasures which can be taken at any time, and are reserved for weather during which entertainment out of doors is not inviting. We were met, after the brief siesta that followed luncheon, in our usual drawing-room, the frescoed hall where I had been first made known to the Duke; and on my saying, with a certain melancholy, to Donna Costanza, that perhaps I might never see the place of the Sorelli again, our Teutonic friend, Hagedorn, had proposed that we should explore what was left of it there and then, under his guidance. Tarquinia improved on this, by a suggestion that the women should come too. And off we trooped, in irregular fashion, up-stairs and down-stairs, along dark passages and through suites of deserted chambers, our cicerone carrying a wax taper as if he were leading us about the catacombs, and holding it up in obscure recesses, where the last vestiges of paint were slowly decaying on the walls, or dusty cabinets stood like despised goblins, or a fluttering rag threw out some ghastly gleam of personality, in the shape of limb or feature, wrought upon it by splendid artists, themselves gone down to Hades long ago.

Hagedorn was the very man for such a journey into the dead past. He made it live again by his ready and expressive strokes, which called up old times at a syllable, quickened the gilded armor with brawny limbs to fill it, snatched a moment of tragedy as from the mists of Medea's caldron, and yet everywhere left the corpse-cloth hanging half down over these phantoms, which glared upon us and then lay still as if they had never stirred. While he lectured, between a smile and a grin, serious but grotesque, and in the temper of Hamlet, our group was continually changing about the man, according to the interest which one or the other felt in the objects of this vast collection. The portraits, I think, and a few recumbent statues on marble slabs, took us all by their appearance of a life not entirely spent. We could have spoken to them and waited for an answer. But the story of this medieval house, unrolled in such fragments of papyrus or mummified relics, and on frescoed coffin-lids—which was my impression of it—ran through centuries of murder, betrayal, conspiracy, with an occasional blotch of even denser sable, in the form of sacrilege. And always the gaunt walls bore witness; the memorials in our sight shrieked or muttered their foul accusation; and every corner held a mystery of which the heart was crimson.

The day, also, added strange terrors to what we saw. It was April in February; spouts of golden rain, with preternatural gloom succeeding; high, sudden, rapidly changing lights; and a consequently fitful animation that came and went with a flicker and a flare, and a will-o'-the-wisp uncertainty, playing its own game up and down the corridors, and rising sometimes into a perfect fury of storm, assailing eyes and ears tumultuously. There were times when Hagedorn's sentence snapped off, cut in two by the howling wind; other times when his voice went out of itself, under pressure from the

darkness. And then, in unconscious agreement with the returning sun, he would brighten up, and laugh, and finish the grim jest that in old stories was not absent from the death-struggle of victims, asking the Church's indulgence, it might be, with half-choked breath, from men who were slaying them in the sacred name of religion.

"This Roccaforte," said the philosopher, "I have studied during thirty-five years with ever-new astonishment. That which overpowers, which magnetizes me in such an old human dwelling, is the quantity of life it will absorb; the hunger it feels for more and more of the tragic as necessary to keep its moldering stones from destruction; the fatality inscribed on them and, in a day such as this, exuding, as it were, visibly, from their inward parts. The house lives its own life, something most unlike ours, less than human, and greater. When I take a deep view of it all, certain terrific lines in Æschylus sound to me as though written of this castle among the Volscian Hills rather than of Mycenæ. Listen to them." And he quoted to me the Greek verses which I have attempted to English here, though perhaps not the genius of Shakspeare could render them adequately:

Lo, the dim Choir that haunts this palace high,
Chanting with one accord no music sweet,—
Ill-omened, rather, since to make them bold,
They quaff, the Sister-Furies, blood of man
Within these halls, and will not be sent forth;
But feasting here, a troop of revelers,
The doom of murder from of old they sing.

"What unknown tongue are you speaking?" said Costanza, struck by the solemnity with which her German friend had mouthed this incomparable bravura from the "Agamemnon." "You must give it in

Italian," she went on, "else the English Signor will get all the benefit."

But Hagedorn shook his head. "No, my dear child, I was not quoting to you. The gods grant you more gracious things. But let us go forward. There is yet a world of curios to conquer up-stairs."

But when we arrived in the upper gallery a mighty wind was blowing that shook all doors and windows. In particular we heard a roaring sound, as from the lungs of some gigantic organ, which appeared to issue out of a sunken door at the northeastern angle of the edifice. By a simultaneous resolution we paused on the landing, and gave ear to this extraordinary tumult. After an interval it fell; then, as though changing into a higher key, it returned with a scattering and intermingling of voices inside the closed chamber that called up the semblance of a dialogue carried on with abrupt and violent outbreaks of passion. When I made this observation to Hagedorn he put on a triumphant smile. "You hear it, then?" he exclaimed. "The three are quarreling as of yore. Six centuries have passed, and still they wrangle. But you never heard the story. I will tell it to you gentlemen," indicating Tiberio and myself—"only first let us enter the room."

We did so, stepping down from the passage upon a stone floor, which had sunk in course of ages. The room was not large, but vaulted, with a long, narrow slit in the outer castle wall to serve as a window, through which the Sabine range was visible under driving storm. No furniture of any kind occupied the interior; its bare, unstuccoed walls gave it the air of a dungeon. "Now lift your eyes to the ceiling," said Hagedorn. We did so, and there beheld, painted as on the inside of an egg-shell or a cup, in colors that kept a certain freshness, two figures, somewhat resembling great birds of prey, engaged in a deadly struggle. Nevertheless, in spite of

their huge wings and the crests of flame or brilliant jewels which they bore, the combatants were human, with features like and unlike, radiantly angelic in the one, saturnine and gloomy in the other. Each was striking at his adversary with a sword; nor would it have been easy to declare which was conquering. These combatants filled the dungeon with a strange light.

"St. Michael and Lucifer, all proper, I suppose?" was my comment to Hagedorn when we had admired them sufficiently.

"Not quite that," he replied. "These are the angels—the souls, perhaps—of two youths that once fought out their death-struggle on the spot where we are standing."

There was an involuntary movement on our part toward the window, but our story-teller laughed in his grisly fashion, remarking, "You will not escape that way from the accursed spot. Indeed, you are getting warmer, as children say in their games." Which admonition brought us back to the middle, under those two-winged and threatening figures.

"You are acquainted, of course, Signori," began our guide, "with the touching boy's romance of Conradin, the last of the Hohenstaufen? From these hills to Tagliacozzo, at the foot of Monte Velino, where he was defeated on the twenty-sixth day of August, 1268, is but a short journey, and with the mind's eye nothing is more easy than to see him marching behind those Sabine peaks and passes to his early doom in the Campi Palentini. You remember, also, that the Pope was his enemy, having bestowed on the French—God knows by what right or no right—the kingdom of Naples. Then, as now, the Sorelli were papal; but then, also, as now, one of them was found to take sides with the Ghibellines, and—pardon my referring to it, Donna Costanza—

his name was Camillo, while his dignity was that of eldest son and heir. His brother, Gaetano, held by the tradition of the Volscian House with the Prince, their father. And, on a memorable day, as these two and the old man were seated in the very room we are visiting, news was brought that Conradin with his Germans had been seen on the march near Aquila. Immediately Camillo was for joining him. His father and brother entreated, threatened, objurgated in vain. A most embittered quarrel broke out which filled this place with clamor. And, at last, the impetuous Gaetano, thundering at him, 'If you must go to the ex-communicate, take the nearest way,' seized upon Camillo, bore him resisting to that window which looks toward the Sabines, and flung him head-foremost out of it."

There was an exclamation of horror from us all.

"Yes," pursued Hagedorn, "he flung him out. Once and again the body dashed upon the jutting masonry below. And legend says, what your young eyes may certify, that a reddish stain, traveling along the wall even yet, marks where his blood sprinkled it."

We had listened breathlessly. Not only was the tale affecting in its curious anticipation of present troubles, but, while Hagedorn was telling it, the storm and sun together had thrown a flickering gleam of life into the fresco upon the vault, which now appeared to yield the victory to this combatant and anon to that, shaking the golden wings free or the russet, in an alternation of lights which every moment changed the effects or the gestures, so that we followed it eagerly, as if uncertain what should be the issue.

Hagedorn continued: "The elder prince fell dead into the ravine. His father, some time afterward, becoming insane or penitent—it is hard to decide which—captured a wandering artist—his name is unknown—

and kept him here in prison until he had executed this remarkable picture. It is at once an apology and an expiation."

"But I have never seen the red stain," said Costanza; "and as for this tempest that goes on muttering to itself in the room, I should think it was nothing but the wind. Signor Ardente, come; let us examine whether any crimson is yet discernible on the castle walls." And, before I could stay her, she had opened the long window and passed out upon the hanging balcony a little beneath it. I followed instantly, Tiberio coming on my track; but the aperture was small, and he remained leaning, as it were, out of the room, while we two stood upon the quaking ledge, now furiously assailed by the sirocco from the southeast.

I can hardly remember what ensued. A noise like thunder filled the room which we had quitted, and then, giving a long, irregular sweep, as about to plunge clean into space, the balcony heaved and yielded, cracked from its holding in the masonry, and was loose under our feet. By a frantic impulse I had leaped back into the room with one arm about Costanza, who clung to me in a sort of convulsion. Her figure, with its garments waving in the air, floated one moment in vacancy. The wind, now at its height, tore away and hurled into the gulf below the rusty iron construction on which we had been standing; and I found myself in the tall, narrow meurtrière, partly crouched within the chamber, but holding Costanza with both arms, and incapable of lifting her to my own level. How long did this last? Impossible to say. But there was Tiberio putting his arm round the girl, as well as the space would permit, to aid me in rescuing her; and I can still hear Costanza's voice, clear as a bell, crying to him, "Don't touch me, you, or I will throw myself down. Albaspina, help!"

There was a blind scuffle; Tiberio was thrust on one side, and Hagedorn, with the vigor of youth in his old limbs, had come to our assistance. Between us we drew the lady up out of that awful tempest, which was raging all round us, in the air outside and in the vaulted chamber.

My arms ached as though they had been broken. But Costanza, who had never lost her presence of mind, did not faint, and scarcely trembled. When she was able to stand, immediately she made her way to the chapel, whither none dared to follow her.

Next morning I left Roccaforte.

CHAPTER XVII

I RETURN FROM THE SOUTH

SIX or seven weeks I spent alone, wandering over that Greek and Norman realm of the South, where history puts on the colors of romance, and memories thick as blossoms spring up at every step, but especially those of seafaring men or gods, from Ulysses to Robert Guiscard, from old mythical explorers to Moorish pirates. I did not leave my forebodings or my fears behind. Often, in the visions of the night, I was at Roccaforte again; I talked with Gaetano in dreams, beseeching him to keep guard before his door, as an enemy was drawing near to it; I felt the solid footing shake under me and plunge into space, while Costanza clung round my neck and cried, as Tiberio showed his pale face in the window, "Do not touch me, or I throw myself down." These terrors pursued me through the whole of my Homeric pilgrimage; if the days abounded in marvels that absorbed my griefs for a while, in sleep I felt the burden which was never henceforth to be shaken off. We did not exchange letters; the Italian has yet to learn the art of correspondence; but I knew from Tiberio's earlier attitude how sure he was of my appearing on the scene at my first free moment, and that our battle was not ended.

In April I came back to Rome, passed a few hours in my old pension at Giovanni Finocchio's, and hastened

out, after due announcement, to the Volscian Hills. Tiberio came with Gaetano to greet me at the railway-station. We talked eagerly and incessantly all the time—during our drive, after dinner, and far on into the small hours of the night. That I was excited, in a mood of unbridled rage, and aflame with rebellious impulses, I do not deny. The time itself pointed to stormy weather. Spurts of revolt were bursting up in most of the large Italian cities; meetings had been forbidden, of Socialists as well as of Catholics; many newspapers underwent fines and occasional suppression; and from Africa, where the ruling statesmen had designed to set up a colonial empire, every other day brought bad news. To revolutionaries like Tiberio Sforza this was encouragement; but even Gaetano, I perceived, had begun to argue with himself that, sooner or later, the Guelfs would be compelled to exchange their policy of passive resistance for measures that might lead them into the field where blows are struck and blood is poured out. And my own temper had been exasperated almost to madness by the inhuman spectacle of Naples and Sicily suffering under the triple yoke of taxes, brigandage, and barbarism.

Thus, all three, we had a common but a dangerous ground on which to meet—a ground heaving with earthquakes and sending up its horrid sulphur-fumes through vents and cracks innumerable. My principles forbade plotting; but I went a long way with the anarchist eloquence of Tiberio; and it was only my deep affection for young Sorelli which held me back from putting heart into him, when he neared the perilous edge. I knew that, once caught in the toils, he would be made a victim by the bold, bad man whose ambition it was to succeed, let his instruments fare as they might. When our talk was over, I blamed myself; what had I to do with pouring oil on the fire which was already

blazing? But there spoke and throbbed in me the fierce misery of those wretched Sicilians, whose story, told at length, would be a world's wonder. I was drunk with it, and my spirit broke out in imprecations. Was the new way doomed to be as corrupt, detestable, and ineffective as the old? Good God, what then had been the worth of battles by sea and land, what the crown of all that striving, thinking, suffering? Only a crown of thorns, tinged yet more deeply with blood?—

So I felt, and so I spoke. At no time would I unsay what I said in those fruitful and unhappy conversations. We seemed now intimate as we never had been before. Of the banditti who had ruined the casino not a trace was discoverable. They had, it was jestingly reported, gone off into Calabria, rife just then with stories of blackmailing or open robbery. Tiberio Sforza talked nothing but politics; hearing him, one would have sworn he was an enthusiast of the most brilliant water, loving freedom on its own account, but tenderly alive to the sufferings of his fellow-men. And yet—

I was not the only friend of Roccaforte that felt uneasy at his growing influence there. One fine morning I met Dr. Mirtillo in my walks along the hillside, where the almond-trees still kept their snow-bloom, and the cyclamen, rosy-white and tender, were showing by thousands in the fresh-springing grass. The doctor and I had become very good friends. Our views, except as regards capital punishment, were not dissimilar; I liked his frank and hearty ways.

“An astonishing fellow, that Signor Conte,” he began, calling Tiberio by the name which he had assumed. “You know I believe a little in the reality of hypnotism, though most medical men fight shy of it. Thus believing, I suspect the Count of practising it on the sly. He has subdued our Duke, and the Prince, and, faith, even myself. We all swear by him.”

"Does Donna Costanza swear by him?" I asked, in no small trouble of mind.

"Donna Costanza!" he repeated, looking at me with a knowing smile. "Ah, what is one to say of her? She is betrothed, you are aware, long since, to the Marchese di Lucera. He comes to claim her, one of these days. Otherwise, I don't say—the Count is a mighty charmer. Not the malocchio! No, because, since he arrived—and he is always coming and going—Roccaforte sleeps in peace. The house is not burned, nor the cattle slaughtered; we have not even a dead brigand to show, like that poor devil of a Renzaccio."

I could have fancied an oblique reference to myself, by way of contrast, in the physician's banter; but I let the talk go by. He had mentioned Lucera, and my thoughts were running upon him. Was it imaginable that Costanza had no choice but to accept that empty-headed popinjay?

I left Mirtillo and walked on. In the course of my rambles, turning down to the Madonna delle Grazie, with some foolish hope of running up against a certain devout pilgrim to the shrine, who was often to be encountered on that hilly path, I saw the venerable form of Don Antonio, the parish priest, where he moved slowly along, his lips reciting prayers from an open breviary. It was not a season to trouble him; but as I showed signs that I wished for conversation, he put up his book, and accosted me by raising his three-cornered hat. In his tremulous but clear notes, when he began to speak, I detected a slight agitation.

"It is very singular, Ser Inglese," remarked the old man, after some words on the beauty of the day and the spring, "but you come to me, as I had been making up my slow mind to come to you. Old people freeze in their wisdom, I think, sometimes. They take so long before venturing upon action."

"What can I do to oblige you, Don Antonio? I am wholly at your service," said I.

He stood still in meditation, looking the picture of all that was amiable and sanctified, with his soft white hair shading thoughtful eyes; then, taking my hand kindly, he went on a few steps.

"This, too, is remarkable," he said at last. "You, as we can all perceive, are neither an Italian nor a Catholic. I am told you represent a great English journal that is the organ of Socialism in London. None the less, I fear you not at all; nor will you ever do our noble house up there," pointing to the castle, "an injury. Not so the other—the Count!" he concluded, hesitating.

I took him up. "Although he is Italian, and, as you suppose, a Catholic—eh, Don Antonio?"

"Even so," he answered; "and surely it is strange. But I cannot like him, or feel happy when he stays with Don Gaetano. He repels me, as if some hidden poison were stored up in his throat, and were he to spit it forth—*Dio mio!*" The good Don Antonio covered his eyes with a trembling hand, showing marks of intense apprehension. I seized my opportunity.

"Do you fear he will captivate Donna Constanza?" I asked, plucking to pieces in my impatience a tuft of cyclamen which I had gathered.

The priest gave me a quiet look, and laughed to himself. "Don't be afraid, Signor, of that, at least. Donna Costanza is in no danger from the Count."

"Because she is promised to the Marchese di Lucera?" I asked boldly.

He laughed again, with great tenderness. "I did not say so, my dear sir. Indeed, I have no right to say anything. But the Signorina is in good hands. No, I dread lest our Gaetano—you are his friend, I can see it, therefore I speak to you—should be drawn, I know

not how, into secret ways, pledges, promises. I cannot tell what the Count is aiming at, except that he may do with our Prince as he will. In this land of ours conspiracy has ever been the curse of eager-hearted young men; and though Gaetano works in the light, I fear, I fear this man's passion, power, and subtlety. A Catholic he is not, whatever he may be. My prayer to you, Ser Inglese, is to take him away, rid the castle of his presence, let him spin his cobwebs elsewhere—the great spider!”

“But if he will not go at my bidding? Nay, more, suppose Gaetano wished him to stay?”

Don Antonio came to a halt again, and lifted his hands impressively. “Then it is the end! Mark me, the end of the Sorelli! Camillo, whom I knew and loved as a child, is lost to us. He will die without heirs; the new order of things has swallowed him. But Gaetano was our hope, our last support. If he, too, is swept away in the tide, good-by to Roccaforte. Down comes the castle with the race that has flourished on those heights seven hundred years.”

“Unless I take the Count along with me, such is your prophecy, Don Antonio?”

“Yes, my prophecy,” answered the beautiful old man, his eyes filling as he turned them on me. “Doubtless, at my age, after all I have witnessed of change during three quarters of a century, I am inclined to view the dark side of things, to see in them warnings and tokens that the world I was born into is passing away. I have never dashed cold water on Gaetano's aspirations; they were lovely and pleasant in my sight. Neither can I welcome this modern, restless, bewildering time; it confuses my poor old brains; it whirls me along at a pace that makes me sick and giddy. But nowhere in it can I discern a place for these ancient races. While they linger in the mountains and keep apart, they may

survive; when they go down there"—stretching out his arm in the direction of Rome—"they will die, like plants rooted up, laid bare to the noonday sun. Take the Count hence, I repeat, if you love Gaetano. He is blighting our Prince, withering our fondest hopes."

I thought it exceedingly true. "Your affection forecasts evil," I said; "so does my knowledge, such as it is, of the world's ways. Believe me, what I can do, I will do. Yet I may fail. Only never forget this, Don Antonio," I added, grasping his delicate hand, "whatever happens, I care as deeply for Gaetano as if he were my own flesh and blood. I admire him; I love him with a full heart. I cannot tell you more. But if the Count—ah, it is no use talking; he will never go until his purpose here has been accomplished."

I ran from the good old man, lest his sympathy should win my secret, and even more mischief be done.

"The Count—the Count!" I soliloquized, keeping on down toward the shrine. "Is there anything that will force him to draw back one of those living tentacles which he has fastened upon the Sorelli? Did I pierce into his dark spirit, I could bring some motive to bear. But it is a sealed volume to me."

Perchance it was not altogether legible to himself. For when I had gone within a dozen yards of the wayside chapel a strange sight arrested my steps. The little fane—a whitewashed building not many feet square, merely an enlarged tabernacle for the picture of the Madonna, stood beneath spreading branches, round which a wild vine had festooned itself like some familiar snake. In the grass hard by a spring bubbled up; and the mountain of limestone, bare with green patches, rose above, making a background such as one is always contemplating in the religious paintings of the school of Giotto. Inside a wire-woven screen

the picture was set into the wall, its lamp burning day and night, while flowers of art or nature and long fresh grasses adorned the iron trellis. Often before I had paused to admire the sweet face of Our Lady, against which the Bambino pressed his baby-countenance; for it was a simple archaic drawing, unaffected and naïve. But when I came to it now, whom should I set eyes on but Tiberio, in the guise of a pilgrim, with a wreath of rosy cyclamen in his hand, which he was substituting for others that hung faded between the interstices.

I was amazed. The man's fingers, I thought, should be dropping blood rather than offering flowers to the Madonna. Was he making up for the death of those two brigands whom he had compelled us to slay, and whose remains we had left unburied in the shade of Monte Majella? Did he still put faith in prayer? Impossible. I walked deliberately forward until he caught sight of me, and then hailing him, "You are engaged on a devout errand, Signor Conte," said I. "How long have you been converted to the ways of your childhood?"

Tiberio's brow darkened. "Who told you I did n't believe in the Madonna?" said he, arranging his garland with a great show of attention. "Besides," catching at a reason that he knew would sting, "perhaps these are gifts from Donna Costanza; I am only the basket that carries them. What say you to that, Ser Ardente? Not jealous, I hope? Yet some one has no eyes for men or things when the Signora is in presence," he added tauntingly. "You will have to be on your good behavior soon, my dear friend. Lucera comes in three days; the Duke weds his daughter to the Neapolitan; and you and I go away like the fox that lost his tail."

"Those are not the Signora's flowers," I said, putting

on a calmer tone. "It is you, Ser Tiberio—you, of all men, that believe neither in God nor devil—who come here with them to flatter and coax the Madonna into overlooking your little enormities. I should take my chance, if I were you, and let the saints alone."

The holy pilgrim smiled. "Eh, eh!" said he, with the characteristic national shrug and eyes aslant. "It will do no harm. If there are saints, the compliment will taste on their lips like honey. Should there be none—but we will not say so here." He finished his reasoning triumphantly with another gesture, and kissed the tips of his fingers to the Madonna behind the screen.

"It is true," he went on, taking my arm, "I have not much of what you cold Northerners mean by religion; but my faith is strong in the Madonna del Carmine; otherwise the Camorristi would take me for a spy and a traitor."

With a final salute to the shrine, he turned away, and, as I could not shake him off, we ascended to the village piazza, busy toward the noonday hour with old women and damsels drawing water, washing linen, and gossiping at the rate of an empty-minded population of jackdaws or magpies out and about in the sunshine. It was a page from the antique—not beautiful, though some of these Rebekahs had fair faces and stately forms, but dirty, hard, prosaic. The great fountain was an ugly stone basin; San Romito looked bare and chill; the houses gaped upon one with their yawning windows; the clear warm light added to their harsh tones and displayed their age-long uncleanness. Neither could one behold a single sprig of green, a touch of vegetation, anywhere. The barren rocks would have seemed far lovelier than these miserable caverns.

Amid so much to weary and disenchant a traveler who has dwelt in our picturesque English villages, I

was taken with the play of dogs and children, running, racing, jumping at one another, rolling over on the filthy cobbled piazza, and making a merry world of it, like boon companions as they were. These drolleries put me in mind of Lupo and Bice, touching whom Costanza had not as yet spoken to me; but as we could hold conversation only at dinner or when others were with us, I felt no surprise. They would surely be at some good school, away from Candia. Hardly had I reiterated this comfortable saying in my own mind, when, looking toward the fountain, I beheld the ill-favored old crone, a pitcher of water balancing on her grimy locks, and running by her Renzo's two children, their rags no less foul than the day I first saw them, their feet bare, their faces unwashed. How came this about? Had they not been sent to school after all?

Disengaging my arm from Tiberio, I ran round to the corner of the lane which ascended to Candia's rocky nest. We encountered suddenly; our eyes met, and in the same moment the ancient dame lost her footing and over went the pitcher, spilling every drop. At which disaster, as was to be expected, Lupo and Bice set up shrieks of delight. Not so their winsome nonna. With one hand she gripped the bronzed pitcher—a relic of heathen grace and simple beauty—with the other, extended in the attitude of the *mano pantea*, she menaced me—the *jettatore*—pouring out a volley of curses, at once blasphemous and shocking, which I dare not attempt to reproduce. The least of the evils imprecated on my head were apoplexy, hanging, and damnation. An occasional word, more emphatic than the rest, was caught up by Lupo and echoed by Bice, whose stammering lips had already begun the trade of cursing and begging, which in every town of Italy are the same profession. Thus I stood, under a shower of evil wishes, rained upon me by Renzo's aunt and children,

as if on the impulse of his "sightless substance" hovering near. It was ludicrous and horrible. Nothing could stop it except the still stronger fascination of money. I had some questions to ask, and I pulled out my purse. At this spectacle the she-Cerberus checked her blasphemies; the children put forth mendicant palms. I held the notes near, but gave none till there was perfect quiet.

"No use crying over spilled water, Nonna Candia," said I; "but money will mend an accident. Pazienza"—for she was clutching at it greedily—"these are pretty children of yours."

I had got so far in my prologue, when she glared across at me with tigerish eyes, red as a coal, and seizing the boy and girl in turn, spat upon their necks hastily. I had made another slip; my praise meant bad luck, which only spittle could avert.

"Let them alone; let me alone. Why do you cross our path?" screamed the hag. "I saw you first the day Renzo was laid out, in the evil hour. Go, and may all the devils roast you in Vesuvo! Let us alone, I say."

"But, God bless the woman, I meant you no harm—neither you nor your bimbi. You shall have these notes, I tell you. There, now you will calm down. But why are not Lupo and Bice at school?"

"Ah, why? School, school! They want no school. Yes, they were sent away—to some place in Rome—Donna Costanza sent them. But I had them brought home again. They shall stay with me. Why must the poor have their children, their darlings, torn from them, to be put in the Foundling, or where know I? My house is school enough for them."

"But the Princess thought they would do better in Rome. Could you not be persuaded to let the poor things go where they would get education, clothes, and all you lack here?"

"I was persuaded," she answered sulkily; "then I had them back. Every one does what the Signora wishes. But," she continued, darting a fierce look at me, "was it the Signora? Lupo told me that he watched you confabulating with her at Renzo's grave—God rest his soul, and God damn to all eternity the man that took his life! Yes, it was after you played with the bimbi and gave them money, she wanted them to go. And you—you are not lucky, Signor. Know you that?"

Now she made the fatal horns without concealment, still expecting as a right the money I had promised. Well, I was not lucky. In that account of me I agreed with Hecate, as she stood there, the children pulling at her ragged dress and slipping into postures that reminded me, oddly enough, of Laocoon with his two boys twined in the serpent's folds. I gave her the notes in silence.

"Thanks," she said gruffly. "Take my counsel, Signor; go to your own country, and leave us to ourselves. Here, little vipers, come along with me—we must fill the pitcher again."

So another of my devices had come to naught. The children were not redeemed. I went my way, feeling very much as a man whose offering for blood-guiltiness the gods had flung back in his face. On arriving at the castle, an impulse, which needed no explanation to me, urged me to pay the chapel a visit, where I had not set my foot since leaving the purse that, I was sure, Costanza had accepted. The place was empty; the afternoon lights left it in shadow. For a while I stood in presence of the dead Christ; then, putting my hand upon the marble, I found my purse where it lay in Madonna's lap, and drew it forth, my gift still within it. Ah, and had the girl shrunk, after all, from dedicating a stranger's money, a heretic's indeed, to her

pious work? I must inquire that of her. In any case Renzo had answered my kindness with implacable scorn.

The air of superstition was infecting me. I did not hold a shred of these beliefs in vengeance from beyond the tomb, or in blood crying out of the ground, yet my conduct during months had been shaped by them. Old Greek stories were running in my head; verses hummed about me, droning their burden of fatality. I was *Œdipus*, doomed to an ironical and pitiless fortune; I was *Orestes*, who could not purge out one crime save by another; I was the victim and the prophet, entangled in the snare which had laid hold of Gaetano Sorelli. Thinking these sad thoughts, while I came down by the winding way which Hagedorn had taught me from the chapel into the Great Hall, at a given angle my friend's voice, curiously distorted, struck upon my ear. I listened; a second voice answered. He and Tiberio were loud in conversation below.

Nay, not so loud. This corkscrew staircase took the sounds at one angle, hurled them to the opposite, against which I was halting, and enlarged them in the process, adding at times a nasal twang, reminiscent of *Pulcinello*. It made me smile, being so grotesque when the matters debated were of life and death. How did these two venture on speaking there, with doors wide open? I think the dialogue had begun accidentally, and Tiberio had seized his chance. He was now holding forth.

"My dear Prince," the conspirator was saying, "we strike at the same enemy, and for my part, I recommend the same weapons. But how few grasp the situation! Shall I give it in three words? The Crown is unpopular, Parliament is in its agony, and one power—one alone—stands erect. The Army, of course! You grant it?"

"I grant it," said the unseen speaker, in a tone of strange sadness.

Tiberio resumed, "Follow me a step further. Who is going to control this Army? You say, the King. I say, not the King. If he and his generals could secure a campaign of victories in Africa, it might be different. But Africa is our Cochin China; we shall lose men, money, prestige. The Army, caro Signore, is not in love with parliaments, and will be enraged against a Royal House that cannot save it from defeat. Again, you agree?"

The voice replied, "What then? No army can act without a captain. Where will you find him—or them?—for we need a General Staff."

"Precisely," cried Tiberio, his accent swelling, and Pulcinello seeming to throw into it a mocking delight. "Now we have it. What I tell you is founded on the best of information. This Army, which reads and thinks, but anyhow is full of the esprit de corps, has in every regiment a lodge, a nucleus, of true Republicans, Federalists—I don't stickle for a name—but I mean the men of to-morrow. You understand? To-morrow! Now, I ask, is it not true that you nobles, you Catholics, have a career open in military life alone, an influence in the Army, and nowhere else? For you Parliament does not exist. We—the men in whose name I address you—can furnish a revolutionary rank and file, with an overpowering number of the better educated non-commissioned officers—proletarians one step advanced. Well—you take me?"

Silence in the room and on the stairs. Gaetano was thinking over these words of Mephistopheles; the charm had begun to work. But he refrained from answering.

"Listen," said the tempter in a lowered voice, still audible to me. "You, Don Gaetano, have an influence

far greater than you dream. You lead the young Catholic nobles, whether in the service or in society. If you formed them into a company—secret it must be, but as pious and papal as you please—with this object, to get the Army under their thumb, by God, I say, you could be King of Italy, Dictator of Rome in five years. Join forces with me, and do it!”

I understood Gaetano to ask, in a drooping, unsteady voice, what Tiberio expected to get by the compact. To which he answered, “I want an order of things in which the strong man comes to the top. I want this great central wheel—this bureaucracy—to be smashed, that is carrying up with it ten thousand scoundrels of *avvocati*. I want the times of the Renaissance back again, when genius and force ruled the world. No, of course I am not a papalino. Clerics and lawyers are much the same to me—to you not, I am aware. But surely, if you had Rome in your grasp, you would be for governing it yourself, the old Princes in their old palaces, dictating to the Fourteen Regions and overawing the Vatican. It is a state of things I should not dislike. I, too, Signore Principe, am a noble; on the mother’s side a Baglione of Perugia; on the father’s—perhaps something more.”

It was a shaft well aimed. Gaetano would feel it, and I heard him answer with some animation. Then my name dropped from his lips. “Shall we take Signore Ardente into our counsels?” he was asking. To which came upon my ear with redoubled mockery the quick response—“Arden is one of those pure English dreamers that are loath to shed any man’s blood, including their own. I would consult him if I were drawing up a manifesto, not if I were founding an association that was to act rather than talk. *We* are the men that have trained Europe in the art of conspiracy—we Italians. No, let him dream his dreams, the gentle Arden.”

Their conference was breaking up. I had to retreat quickly toward the chapel, and I ascended to the dark old battlements, where I could muse at leisure on this uncomfortable scene. The bird, I thought, is not yet limed; but he is hovering round, picking up the sweet grain that has been scattered for him. What counter-attraction would draw him away? I knew of none but his religion; and how far would that avail? Then I called up in mental vision that incident in the painted chamber which revealed to me how deeply Donna Costanza suspected, or even hated, Tiberio Sforza. The accent with which she repulsed him was a sign of instinctive and overwhelming distrust; could I not turn that to account? I made up my mind accordingly. The arch-plotter had threads in all directions; he was effective master of Santa Fiora and his banditti; on terms of friendship with Don Camillo, and possibly with other great persons in this extraordinary Government, rebels of yesterday, sovereign rulers to-day. Neither did I question that his influence went deeper still into the gloom where anarchists sharpened their poignards and forged their thunderbolts. Yet a brave woman's hand might tear this web to pieces. I would see what could be done.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE GREEK THEATER AT TUSCULUM

THE day arrived on which Lucera was coming from his Calabrian forest to claim Donna Costanza's hand. Every one spoke of it as a settled thing, not in public, but in the talk which plays round events of which the shadow is falling over us.

A day which would have graced some more delectable match—the heavens one stainless sapphire, blue gulfs of air, immeasurable as the eye attempted to fathom them; the land such as Spenser would have chosen for his wedding-feast—blossoms everywhere, the foliage a pure delight, fresh like sea-blooms, on the margin of the hills, or along the edge of fields, themselves, during this perfect moment, green as an English May. The nightingales were singing in every bush, not melancholy, but from a heart of fire, that would not suffer them to be still, as they trilled and shot forth long luscious notes, and panted with excess of joy, and contended against each other, in cascades and torrents of headlong music—a sweet spring ecstasy. And we were driving or riding through the lovely land, from Roccaforte, between the mountains, and on to Tusculum—an expedition I had begged of Gaetano, which I meant to enjoy before Lucera took Costanza with him and my bitter-sweet remembrance of the Sorelli had turned to pain.

A day of the troubadours, full of strange intoxication. The three women, Costanza, her aunt, and Tarquinia—for the actress had lately come back to us—drove at a rapid pace, in their light carriage, and we young men cantered along, running races when the fit took us, and letting the spring chase down our veins, with a light word here, and an allusion to old historic times there, and a humming of the gay Italian airs that broke from one's lips by instinct; and in our talk, as we moved round the advancing carriage, we became, I know not how, true landscape-painters, interpreting the noble sights of mountain, sea, and garden, not so much by distinct epithets as by a certain transfusion of their spirit into what we were saying. The recorded conversation would tell you as little of all this as a box of colors will give you of one of Turner's flaming skies. But I think our company had gathered from these clumps of holm-oak and flowering chestnut the golden bough that Virgil saw growing in the Forest of Diana, through the green gloom of which we rode, telling one another its legend in half-remembered lines from the Sixth *Æneid*. I never felt more deeply the magic of his verse.

The expedition lasted many hours. We had taken the longer round, so as to include a gallop on the edge of the crater in which Nemi sleeps, coiled up, a glittering snake in its hollow; then past the lake and city of Albano we rode, under the giant boughs that overhang those level avenues, the gallerie, which take you on by Castle Gandolfo, toward Frascati. But we turned, at a given point, to the right, ascended the hills once more, and so reached the grassy slopes and fringing woods of Tusculum. Mountains rose on every side as on the rim of an amphitheater, or else they sank into mysterious overarched glades, or laid themselves out in vales which were now a land of flowers, dotted here and there with herds of the fawn-colored, mild-eyed oxen

conspicuous by their wide branching horns, where they roamed or rested.

Silenus, clad in goatskins, sat on a boulder, playing to his flock some curious unending strain, with the Pandean reed at his lips. And we betook ourselves to the shelter that Italians love, under immense branches through which the sunshine filtered in, and there, by running water, we made, I think, as merry a meal as any of the great old Roman fathers could have wished, and pleasanter than their formal banquets in the villas of which scarcely a stone was discoverable. High above towered the arx, or citadel, of Telegonus, or, at least, the piles of rock which it once had crested. The kestrels flew around with a scream; the Pandean pipe whistled to sleepy noonday birds that sometimes answered it: else, there was a deep silence, hardly broken by our talk and laughter. We were lords of Tusculum and these heights.

After our meal we went up to spy out the land. "Always that enchanting yet so forlorn spectacle," said Gaetano, when we had come to the huge black Cross which crowns the mountain. "There is the Campagna, strewn like the floor of ocean with wrecks and treasures—a sea bounded by Soracte, the lion that watches couchant over its everlasting secret—our Roman Sphinx, crowned with stars or snows, even in this magic sunlight solemn as death. Where are the Imperial people? Seek them in the dust on which a million wild flowers have sprung up! The Campagna is a great winding-sheet, laid upon the face of the dead."

Costanza pointed away to St. Peter's, lofty even at this altitude. "There is Rome," she said proudly; "it will never die. Does it not draw all nations still? Have you lost faith in it, Gaetano?"

We were standing as in the presence of something very great, beyond words, which seemed to rebuke us

silently. "How slight, how thin, is the shadow that we cast," I could not refrain from saying, "on this eternal background! Consider all that have lived among these hills. Your kindred, Don Gaetano, held Tusculum, Colonna, Marino, the castles round about, for hundreds of years; but, pardon me, they sink out of sight; and, as Donna Costanza says, there is Rome! Still it enthralls the world, not by strength or violence, but by a spell more profound than we can search into—by its old religion, its classic memories, its beauty, its pathos. But," I went on tremulously, "who are they that see these things as they should be seen? Not you Romans, ah, no; if you had ever seen them as we see them,—we strangers from islands or continents now beginning their golden prime,—you would not be rent into factions and conspiracies; you would reckon yourselves the knights of St. Peter's sepulcher, the keepers of the Roman shrines, Christian or Pagan, and of all the precious things they hold—the first citizens of Church and State. Whereas, for a thousand years, you, I say, Romans of Rome, have dipped your hands in blood, not minding what befell the religion or the civilization of which you were the guardians. That is your unpardonable crime."

The Prince was struck with my earnestness. "For what are you pleading, Ser Ardente?" he inquired.

But Tiberio broke in. "For the impossible!" he cried. "I think I have heard of Plato's city of philosophers; you would have the Romans dedicate themselves to Humanity, as those sublime sages were supposed to do. Let Humanity take care of itself. What I admire in these medieval nobles, and in the populus to which Rienzi appealed, is their passion for freedom; but no one is free where all are equal. Give us back, I say, the Counts of Tusculum—the strong man and the red hand!"

Donna Costanza took up the argument. "If you love strong men, Signor Conte, look below you," she said in her fervent tones. "Yes, to those small white cells of the Camaldoli, grouped about that church where the bells are ringing. Is it not a picture of peace, sweet and tranquil? The home of silence, prayer, work, self-sacrifice? Those are my heroes—the aged men in white raiment, who slay their passions instead of reddening their hands, as you would have them do. Why," she went on, kindling to a flame of eloquence, "this little spot in the Latin Hills, which it seems one could hold like a pearl up to the light, is visible heaven. But your strong men have the taint of fire and blood upon them; they are tyrants, not heroes."

We continued exploring the landscape, while this argument volleyed about us. Camaldoli was a page of medieval romance, framed in the woods as in a border illuminated, strangely inspiring by the quiet which it breathed from a distance. I did not want to travel down or see it nearer. In all these ancient things, perspective counts for much: the sense that one does not belong to them, never could have a part in their life; the haze of faith or illusion which was necessary to their existence. And so I would not go to the neighboring monastery of San Silvestro, upon the hill that rises over against Tusculum, where, as Donna Anastagia informed us, there was an authentic portrait of Saint Theresa, and also the body of a modern hermit, still undecayed. It was enough for me to bring these many shades of color into the same painting; they made Tusculum rich with complex memories.

But Tiberio was led away by the Prince, or probably led him, to the tufted alleys of the Ruffinella; it was clear they had much to debate. And I went wandering listlessly in the direction of the Latin Vale, and by and by turned and came down to the ruins of the Greek theater, hoping against hope that when the ladies

of our party had finished their prayers at San Silvestro, some happy chance might bring me across Donna Costanza. The day was fleeting on: if I lost this, I should find no other opportunity.

But, for once, I was not unlucky. The Princess was there—alone, pacing in deep thought over the narrow stage, flagged with lava, from which the outlook extended wide enough to give our meeting a public and unpremeditated air. On the tiers of seats in front of us an audience might have watched our greeting. Down over the wall which closed in the stage at the back a vine had come trailing from the neighboring vineyard, and a huge old fig-tree had thrust its arm through some crevice in the rock, as though demanding worship for Bacchus even now, despite the empty proscenium where no altar smoked, no chorus moved to the anapests or circled the thyme. There stood Costanza, in the mourning weeds that she always wore out of doors, inflicting on one the impression rather of a priestess than of a maiden for whom the bridegroom was on the threshold.

Imagination stirred in me some tragic melody, simple but heart-subduing, as I came up to her.

"You look still unhappy, Signor Arden," she said in her soft undertone. "Is it Lupo and Bice that make you so?"

"The children, Signora, and these hands. Mine are reddened, as I told you in the cemetery, with blood I need not have spilled. I was hoping my penance would be accepted; but the gods are hard to reconcile."

"You found your purse where you left it," she said, as if pitying me; "I put it back there when the little ones were taken home again." I made a hasty gesture. She continued, with a break in her voice, "Perhaps you blame Costanza? But do not, Signor Arden. I had Lupo and Bice sent to school; but Candia—"

"Yes, yes, she told me herself, not realizing what

share I had in it all. And you did not fling away my offering? Had you been in the place of the gods you would have accepted it? Thanks, my deepest thanks. I feared—”

“Hush, Signor; what strange words you English utter! The gods, you say. But, are you, then, a Pagan? I am sure the Madonna did not frown upon your offering. Be not so troubled. There is trouble enough already.”

She sighed, and, I think, would have put the question to me that I anticipated.

“Enough, my dear lady? There will be more,” I said, “unless you can hinder it. Now, you look alarmed. We have the same name in our hearts, which I will dare to pronounce—the Count! Is it not so?”

“He is always with Gaetano,” she whispered. “Why did they leave you, and go down to the Ruffinella? And oh, Signor mio, what persuaded you to bring that dreadful man to Roccaforte?”

She clasped her hands with a most forgetting and tender grief. Her expression, always full of courage and light, was one of pensive resolution, not uncertain at all of herself, as I could see, but such as a heavenly thing might put on, who beheld his charge falling into a peril of great darkness. I knew how she loved Gaetano.

“You would do everything to save your brother?” I said.

Her smile came quickly. “I would give my life, my heart, for him,” she answered. “But there is one thing I never would do. Your eyes ask me what that impossible thing may be. Alas! it is a fear that has now drawn close. I am in the thick of that cloud. To-night the Marchese di Lucera arrives—” She stopped, as one whose lips are twitched with intolerable pain.

"Yes, yes," I said eagerly, "the Marchese comes. We all know why. This day you are free—the last of your days; to-morrow—"

"To-morrow I shall be no less free," Costanza was saying in my delighted ear, "but I shall have disappointed my dear father, and put a terrible estrangement between Gaetano and myself. I cannot marry Lucera. You should know this, that you may judge of my future influence with your friend."

The lights and music of a golden play flashed upon me when I heard these never-to-be-forgotten words. The sun danced in the heavens; Tusculum, with all its flowers and little streams, broke into rejoicing; the glades sent up a triumphal chorus from their hidden depths. Fairyland unfolded its gleaming gates, through which I leaped suddenly to happiness.

"Donna Costanza, what are you telling me?" I cried in a voice that could not conceal its tumultuous joy and fear. "You will not take Lucera? You refuse him? Free to-morrow as to-day? But, oh, if you are free, can you look upon me that has worshiped the steps of your feet? One that, when he thinks of Paradise, turns to his remembrance of you?" I may have said much else, and yet more passionately. But a glance at the dark-vestured figure sobered me.

"I am sorry—no, glad in a certain strange way, Signor mio," said Costanza at last, her face very pale, but there was a brightness in the eyes that spoke of tears kept down—"yes, glad and sorry. You let me see into your heart. It is clear to me as crystal. That you should think so well of me, for that I do thank you; and for the courage—surely it was courage—that kept you silent until now, I am greatly honored"—the tears fell quietly, without hysteria, not without emotion. After a little she resumed, "We will not speak of this to any one. Be braver still; yet, if you find

help in the thought of—Costanza—how shall I forbid you? Ah, no. But for me there is no marriage—perhaps for you none.”

I had not recovered from my draught of happiness. These words were incapable of so changing that wizard’s cup. The sun danced, the May breezes sang; Tusculum was Cithæron, with echoing horns and the wild Mænads shouting.

“But have you vowed a vow not to marry?” I exclaimed. “That alone could keep us asunder. What signifies the rest?”

I was not asking even that question; but the rush of feelings would find a voice; Costanza’s mild rebuke fell unheeded.

“My secret is mine,” she answered, with a marvelous rosy light upon her features. “Ask me nothing; but tell me now in what manner I am to draw Gaetano away from the Count. If it is not done to-day, see how impossible it will be after I have refused the Marchese Sismondo.”

It was already impossible. The winds were sweeping every hope of rescue into the Mediterranean, where the sun was going down. Costanza had scarcely uttered her last words, when the two men came up from the Ruffinella, the other ladies joined us, and we began our long drive homeward. I could say nothing in private to the Signorina. As we reached the castle, lights in many windows, servants running to and fro, and a general air of preparation for some joyous event, announced that Lucera had arrived and that guests were in the Great Hall to meet him.

CHAPTER XIX

MY LAST DAY IN UDOLPHO

THE play that now went forward was acted partly behind closed doors, but with such haste and fury that one day sufficed, by a dreadful unity of time, to bring about the catastrophe. In this, as in every decisive moment of my life, I stood alone. But why talk as if my fate only were involved? We were all striking at one another in a blind hazard; those that loved most did, perhaps, the deadliest mischief.

At the dinner-party that evening Lucera was in high spirits, loud and gay. I think he had not expected to meet me among the guests at Roccaforte; but who was the insignificant Englishman where noble names filled all ears and mouths? A jettatore, no doubt. The Marchese, when I happened to be looking at him, turned pale, though handling his sprig of rue ostentatiously. With Tiberio he was very gracious. They had met several times before, and they talked away, not of the plans that lay near Sforza's heart, but of pedigrees, love adventures, Naples, and the good old times of King Ferdinand, whom Lucera's father had served at Poggio Reale, when better men were languishing in prison. Tiberio had the secret of influence; he never seemed to choose his own topics, but listened, smiled, laughed, and cared supremely for the man who

was boring him to interminable lengths. Had he seduced Gaetano yesterday? He would seduce the Marchese to-morrow.

But on the morrow the scene changed. I knew that some great thing must happen, and I waited in front of the closed doors until by voice or motion within I could conjecture how the play went. A mere formality! Lucera had long since obtained the Duke's permission to pay his addresses in Roccaforte, according to the jealous South Italian custom—now a little infringed upon by modern and sentimental innovations—which reckons the friendship of the father as equivalent to the daughter's love. There was to be a meeting in the Duke's apartment, with Gaetano looking on, between the two young people, their consent exchanged, the last step taken before signing the contract that night in a brilliant assembly. We mere guests, lounging about the corridors, saw Donna Costanza pass with her aunt into the room where Lucera and the Sorelli, father and son, were waiting. The lady was smiling, but her bright eyes and quick step betrayed a fever in the blood, which the occasion would naturally call forth. Was she going, after all, to take the man? I did not yet comprehend that heroic temper. The air seemed charged with electricity. I saw that Tiberio lingered, as I was doing, in expectation of news; but we never talked now except when others were present. He knew that I detested him. An hour went by. Had nothing happened? All at once there was a stir, an agitation, a violent outcry, accompanied with the rushing of feet along the passages, and followed by the ringing of various bells. Ser Angelo, the steward, crossed over the courtyard hastily on his way to the stables. I held him for a moment, much against his will. A good-tempered, placid nature, serviceable and easy, at this time he was in a hot fit of impatience.

"By and by, Signor," he exclaimed; "let me go now. I am in a hurry; the devil is at my heels."

But I kept fast hold of him. "What devil do you mean?" said I. "Surely not the Marchese di Lucera?"

"Who else but the Marchese?" he said snappishly, pulling himself away from me. "Yes, Lucera, and only Lucera. The Signorina—let me go, I beg—she has refused this rich marriage; all is in confusion; the Marquis calls for his horses; the great dinner must be put off. I never saw my master so broken; as for Don Gaetano—ugh, a whirlwind in March! Let me go, I say."

The man tore off; others came running. Apparently our Neapolitan was not going to take his defeat in silence; there would be shouting and clamor at all events. But where was Costanza? What would become of her? She was absolutely in the Duke's power, and he might constrain her yet. While I was piecing out the incidents of this—I knew not how to call it—this tragedy, which certain comic touches made more singularly impressive, the rejected lover was calling for his steed, the young men were riding with messages—I saw them galloping in all directions—to put off guests who would be most unwelcome. The castle had suddenly awakened to a sense of present disaster instead of brooding on medieval crimes. While these images flitted through my brain, Tiberio came up and spoke to me.

"Is it true, Signor Arden, that Donna Costanza has thrown over Lucera?" he asked.

"Ser Angelo tells me as much. How should I know?" was my angry answer.

"Pardon, my dear friend. It is a moment to be calm. Of course you would not know."

"Signor Tiberio," I said, calling him by that name, "if you desire to be informed about matters which

concern neither you nor me, there is Lucera coming down the great staircase. Ask him yourself, if you dare."

"Certainly I dare," he answered, darting a venomous look at me.

I was not astonished; he had that gift of sudden resolution. But I watched them both curiously. A hundred passions were chasing over the dark features of the Neapolitan, who was cloaked and spurred, as for instant departure. When Tiberio accosted him he started back, as if shot, gave a furious reply, and was for passing on. Then the other whispered half a dozen words and Lucera turned, hesitated, asked question upon question, nodded, and broke into a laugh, and finally took Sforza by the hand, which he wrung with a fierce grasp. What did this pantomime signify? Not a word of their dialogue had reached my ears, but I could perceive it made or left them friends, not enemies. The Marchese ran down the steps with a clatter; Tiberio followed. Again they were whispering and exchanging salutes. Immediately afterward Lucera hurried to the gate, where his man was waiting with a magnificent pair of bays. He mounted one, the groom took the other, and I saw them going at a mad pace, fire striking up under the horses' hoofs, down the precipitous path which led from Roccaforte toward Velletri. They would be in Rome, if that was their destination, in less than three hours.

The tumult in the castle subsided. Tiberio, passing me without a syllable, went through the gateway, above which that dagger was idly held in the hand which I always dreamed should have struck him down when he entered Roccaforte. I saw no sign of the Duke or Gaetano, and being restless, and in an excitable fashion happy, now that Lucera had vanished, I made my way into the ancient woods, pulled some of the great spires

of the chestnuts under which I was taking a stroll, and wasted more hours than I could have calculated in sunshine-fancies and pleasant dreams of a future that my fairy godmother, if I had one, would now be devising for me. Thus I had rambled on, by thicket and copse, until I found myself near the huge boulder, now overgrown with creepers and long vines, where, as Tarquinia said, she had encountered the Robin Hood page of Tiberio. I looked and rubbed my eyes. The page was there in his forester's green attire. Close by him stood Santa Fiora. They had only just met. The page, Ascanio—for I knew him at once—was talking fast, pointing in certain directions, as though to explain some purpose which involved a knowledge of the topography, and coming back, I thought, to sentences already uttered. Santa Fiora did not answer at length, but his motions testified acquiescence and understanding. Both were so absorbed that I might have taken fair aim at them; and, beyond a doubt, had Gaetano stood by my side he would have done it. My wisdom was to remain motionless and well out of sight. After more conversation they parted, Santa Fiora moving on paths which would bring him out toward Velletri, the lad resting in a thoughtful attitude, his plumed cap in his hand, by the great stone. I allowed a sensible time to elapse; but as he did not move I determined on getting speech of him.

“Good morning, Ascanio,” I said, strolling up the glade as though I had only just come that way. “You are expecting your master, I suppose?”

The lad saluted me and deliberately put on his cap. “Did he tell you that, Signor?” was his reply, with a perceptible touch of irony.

“Or you have seen him, and brought a message to my friend Santa Fiora, whom I recognized in talk with you a moment ago.”

The shot told. Even on that pallid face there was a

tremulous flush. "Is Santa Fiora your friend?" he inquired, as if doubtful how far he could put confidence in me.

"How should I know him otherwise? My friend, or at least my correspondent—eh, Ascanio? And your master's friend. But what is he doing in these parts? I understood him to be a denizen of the Mattese. So you had a message for him from the Count?"

Ascanio looked me straight in the eyes and laughed a clear, ringing laugh, as frank as a nightingale's trill. "Whether I have seen my master or no I shall not tell you, Signor. And what I was saying to Santa Fiora, or Santa Fiora to me, you will find out when the time comes. But one thing I have to warn you—and it is pure kindness—the sooner you leave these mountains the safer you will be. Go away from Rome; put the Alps between yourself and Santa Fiora. Your business at Roccaforte is done. Why do you stay, then?"

All this was given out with incredible quickness in a tone between impertinence and good will, as if delivering a set form of words that he had learned by heart. How much, I asked myself, did the lad know of my proceedings since I had come to Rome? There was one who could inform him, had he chosen—my young Apollo, the bandit Carluccio. But I would not think he had betrayed me.

"Perhaps I shall take your advice soon, Ascanio," I said, musing on his romantic appearance and innocent, saucy ways. "But you, too, mio caro, why do you stay? If Santa Fiora and your master are such men as we know, entangled in plots and wickedness, do you mean to give them your young life? Come, here is a bargain. I will go to England on condition that you come with me."

"What! I with you, Signor? Ah, heaven, how droll you are! Ah, how droll! I—and leave my master?"

The light-hearted elf, or woodland sprite, as he seemed, was laughing with a sudden boyishness; then he stopped, and I saw he was crying impetuously, as a child that has been threatened with a beating. "Away, away!" he exclaimed, striking at me with his plumed cap. "It is true, as every one says, you have the evil eye; you bring bad luck. What made you spit such a word at me as 'leave my master'? I spit it back at you—there," and the lad hissed like an adder. "Do not you come between me and the Count. I am his—only his, to do with me whatever he will. Ah, take your ugly face somewhere else, fascinatore! I spit on you and defy you."

He turned swiftly, coursed down a track among the thick-set undergrowths, and was gone before I could tell whither he had vanished. There is something magnetic in genuine passion; moreover, I was throbbing yet from the enchantment of that colloquy on Tusculum with Donna Costanza, and I felt in Ascanio's language and bearing an intense devotion to his master, such as leads youth along the highest summits of heroism or plunges it into abysmal deeps. The child was bewitched; no persuasion could undo the effects of that evil eye.

Yes, I concluded, turning home, it was likely that he had met Tiberio by appointment; that a message had been passed on to Santa Fiora; and that we should hear the thunder only when we had seen the lightning. One day had made all the difference. Gaetano would be deaf now to the warnings from Costanza.

I was within a bowshot of the Madonna delle Grazie, in a sequestered and lovely dell, round as a cup, when Gaetano stood before me.

Until I saw his face, in which it was impossible not to read a tragic expression, I had felt all the morning an absurd but intense happiness. The words that sang

round my heart were those which Costanza had spoken on Tusculum, "Free to-morrow as to-day"; and she was free. Lucera, galloping toward Rome, ended the long chapter of their supposed but unnatural engagement. How did that alter my prospects? I could not say; but I rejoiced. In this little dell, where May was playing its frolic with all beauteous leaves and blossoms, rippling the waters of a tiny streamlet—one of the innumerable fountains cast abroad by the great limestone hills—and drawing down the sun itself to a game of hide-and-seek, one might have dreamed a lover's dream, with Costanza for its goddess leaning over the rapt Endymion. I had, perhaps, fallen into such a fancy, the glow of which passing on now to Gaetano's olive cheek, he appeared to me at once tender and formidable—a man to worship, yet with some undercurrent of dread. The sun, doubtless, gave him a portion of his radiance, my imaginative affection the rest. He was dressed as for a journey.

"Are you going away, Don Gaetano?" I asked in a cheery tone.

His eyes flashed. I could have thought my accent, affectedly careless, smote him like a whip. He drew a pace nearer.

"Signor Ardente," said the young man, putting pressure on his voice, that else would have sprung at my throat, "I am for Rome within the hour. I must ask your company."

His hand trembled and fell with a military motion as on the hilt of a scabbard. He was fearfully shaken, biting his lip, as I perceived, until the blood came, and moving uneasily with the discomfort of a man into whose face the sun is shining.

"I will go with you to Rome—to the world's end, Don Gaetano. You may count upon my friendship." I would have said more, but he cut me short.

"Indeed? On your friendship? Your love, too, I dare say. Are you so deeply attached to the House of Sorelli? But come, sir—to Rome! We have business there, you and I."

The meaning of these muttered and strangled sentences I could not immediately make out. Immense rage, irony, resolution; so much was palpable to my feeling, but directed against whom? Did the Prince intend a quarrel with—with Lucera?

"There is something strange in your voice, Don Gaetano," I said quietly, not making too much of it. "Surely you are not following the Marchese Sismondo to the Porta San Giovanni? I saw him ride off a few hours ago. You have never resolved on a duel with him, though you look so fiercely? Yes," in answer to his silent questioning, "I have been told what has taken place."

Then the deep voice broke on me in thunder. "Did my sister, did Costanza tell you, scoundrel that you are?"

I put him back with a motion of my hands. "No nearer, Prince. Not an inch! Whom do you call by such a name—not Arden Massiter?"

"Yes, Arden Massiter, my guest, my friend, the man that saved my life," he said with extreme bitterness, tasting every word as if to feel how nauseous it was, and striking his forehead in despair. "Yes, Arden, I grant all this; I cannot deny it. Would to God I could! But grant it a thousand times, you are only the more an atrocious scoundrel, and I mean to kill you. Come away, I say; pack up, drive into Rome, and find your seconds. Among so many English you will have at least one friend."

If I were to die for it I must have laughed. The hair bristled on this lion's brow; but I laughed—a loud, provoking laugh, fitly to be answered with a stroke across the mouth. "You will fight and kill me,

Gaetano mio?" I exclaimed, while he continued gazing at me in astonishment. "Povero mio Signore, don't you know Englishmen never fight duels? If you want that satisfaction, pursue after Lucera."

"Then you are a coward as well as a sneak," he said, after a moment of passionate reflection, during which, I am certain, had he been wearing a sword he would have thrust it into me. "You steal the hearts of our girls; but, poltroon, you will not meet their brothers in the field! Must I have you beaten like a dog by my stable-boys?"

He approached, and would have laid a hand upon my collar.

"Hands off, Gaetano," I shouted, "or by the living God I will break your neck! No, we English fight no duels, and we steal no hearts. Hands off, I tell you." He had already grappled me; but I was much the stronger man of the two, with muscles which constant exercise in the open air had made like whipcord—and he knew it, for we had often fenced and even wrestled together. So now, when his grasp was on me, I shook it off, throwing him to some distance. He stumbled, rose up with quivering nostrils and eyes aflame, intent upon a second assault; but I looked straight into his countenance, saying, "Gaetano, if we must fight, we will. Only not here. Tell me, first, in what I have done you wrong."

"In what?" he cried vehemently, dashing the drops of sweat from his forehead. I thought, even at an instant so engrossing, of the marble attitude of some god in the Vatican, heroic and wrathful. "In what?" he repeated. "Have you not made love to my sister, entrapped her to private interviews, persuaded her to break off the match with Lucera? And in what have you offended is your question! Ah, Madonna Santissima, these English—these English!"

Here was a deadly coil. How to make him understand? I did not reply, as another might have done, by one sharp negative which, after all, would be the simple truth of the situation. He felt, by this deep silence, that we were beginning to fence, as it were, in the dark; and he waited till my voice should acquaint him where to strike. Still I considered my next words, and answered nothing.

"You acknowledge it all, then,—the treason that wipes out our friendship with a bloody smear?" said the Prince. "Why, man, you are not clean enough for a gentleman to touch you. Good day, and get you gone." He had taken a stride across the dingle and was climbing the hill before I could find my voice.

"Don Gaetano," at length I cried with ringing emphasis, "come back one instant. I have something to say. Come back, or you will be sorry the longest day you live."

At that he turned, moved reluctantly to the place which he had quitted, and fixed his eyes on me with ineffable disgust. "Will you confess now?" he said.

I answered him steadily, "There is not much to confess. But you are welcome to it. I have been in love with Donna Costanza from the moment I saw her. It is true; I know it at this hour; I did not know it then. Yesterday, in the theater at Tusculum, I told her—do you hear, Gaetano?—I told her less than this, but enough. Never before did I breathe to your sister one syllable of my feelings. That is all I have to say."

"And what was her reception of your suit?—you do not tell me that."

"No, and I never will. Except only that it has made no difference to her dealing with Lucera."

"None? You lie, it seems to me, Ser Ardente, too innocently. What ground has my sister for declining

a match that we all had set our hearts upon, if not this infatuation for a stranger?"

At these words May began to carol about me with all its sweet madrigals and resonances. Could they be true? "Oh, did Costanza send you with that heavenly message?" I exclaimed, quite out of myself, "and you would set a foil to it, my Prince, with your challenges and your threatenings? Consummate actor!"

Of such an outburst, as was natural, Gaetano, who had never himself, so far as I knew, been in love, could make neither sense nor reason. "You are mad, Signor," he answered testily, "she did not mention your name. But why refuse Sismondo, if you have not cast a spell upon her?"

My rhapsody had perplexed his thoughts; for it would never have been uttered by a triumphant suitor unless he was cherishing some deep-laid plans.

"Why refuse him?" I echoed with a sigh. "Perhaps, being so devout, she wishes to take the veil. I know Hagedorn thought so."

He shook his head with its golden-brown curls, and looked more angry than before. "No, it is something else. It is you, and your malocchio. Aye, stare at me; I can return your glance; I am not afraid of you, though all the country is. You know it; I see it in your malignant smile. But if you did not speak of love to Costanza, why, let me ask, did you talk with her a full hour in the cemetery? What business of any sort had you with the Princess?"

I gave a sudden start when he had thrown out this question. The serpent of which I was enduring the poisonous fang had lifted its head in the grass. Not Costanza had spoken, but Tiberio—the master spirit to whom Candia and all evil things in the vicinity owed their allegiance. Should I reveal these hidden tragedies of the Camorra? Then Gaetano's sword would

be in the villain's heart. And what afterward? No, the secret lay on my tongue; yet I was compelled to swallow it back.

"My friend," I said at last, "I grieve you and myself—to no purpose. Again I swear that until yesterday I never spoke of love to Donna Costanza. Nor shall I ever speak of it again. I have taken leave of Roccaforte. I will go to Rome; you stay here, and look well to the dangers that lie in ambush on your path."

He was listening, intently but unconvinced.

"Do not," I resumed, "trust any one. You have taunted me as a coward and a sneak. I am neither. You know whether I can fence; you will allow that I have a strong and supple wrist. And you have seen me shoot. Nevertheless, I will not send you my seconds or take notice of yours, should you send them. And," I concluded, with a sudden fever in my heart and eyes, "take this last word. I will never set foot in your castle until you, Gaetano—mark, I say you and not any other—bring me back again."

"Ay! wait till then," he said grimly, with a lurid gleam upon his brow where the sun, dusky through I know not what scarlet leaves, was resting on him. No more farewell than that! He went swiftly up the glade; and I, when his footsteps on the rocky soil had quite died away, turned and with a fast-beating pulse set out for Rome.

The day was declining. As I came on the open road, below the village, on one side the sea glistening, and to my right Roccaforte with all its gateways, towers, and roofs—the castle supreme over church and piazza—I saw a singular vision. Clouds had arisen in the east, which a fiery sunset was painting in every imaginable tint of purple, as if the sky had become a volcano and were pouring out smoke and flame mingled together. From base to battlement Roccaforte seemed

on fire ; the stones of its mighty buildings shone with a crimson russet, every line visible ; and all its windows blazed in saffron, with topazes instead of glass, and jewels dyed in the sun, a luster that no eye could bear to look upon. The beauty, the horror, the fascination of a spectacle so rare excited and thrilled me. I watched until the scarlet faded and the jewels were quenched. I had seen Roccaforte as a specter in the sky, this death-light upon its face, its story of battle and crime legible to those who had an inward capacity of reading it. For the last time ! And I hastened on my journey, which would soon take me into the Appian Way and through the clinging mists of the Campagna.

CHAPTER XX

I TAKE SANCTUARY

I NOW hastened on some miles, the fever in my veins which I had brought from that woodland dell, and every step reminding me of yesterday—for my journey went over the same ground as far as Albano. But the Feast of Troubadours, the May that sparkled and sang, were touched this afternoon, I thought, with a strain of intense dejection. Yet the sun flamed in front on mountain and lake for a changing hour; I had the sea on my left, a heaving plain of gold, with silvery clouds high above it, and down to the Campagna I went, a lonesome figure. What, indeed, was left to me? For I will speak my mind. Except Laura, whose remembrance stayed with me as part of my most delightful year, nothing remained of England but a distant shadow. My father and I had fallen out; my brother—as I find is so often the case between brothers—had always been a stranger to me. This old classic land of Italy was my home; I felt the blood of its ancient races warm within me; all that I had of life blossomed under its ripening and miraculous sunlight. Thus in leaving Roccaforte I seemed to be plunging off the last spars of wreck into the waves.

I made a halt at beautiful La Riccia, close to its great viaduct which spans the valley with a triple tier of arches, and in some foul spaccio di vino I broke a

morsel of bread and gulped down a flask of Castellano. This gave to my fever a sort of exhilaration. I fell into all manner of satirical and grotesque fancies which I should be ashamed to write, for they were the very babblings of a mind diseased. I thought of Tiberio picking up the tricks and marking the score. He would now be master of the Sorelli, of Costanza; but what was his game with Lucera? Anyhow Gaetano appeared to be caught, and by his means the young Absaloms of the Catholic party. But perhaps I could defeat my enemy at this wing of the combat, though beaten everywhere else.

Getting a lift on a wine-cart, which was trundling its slow way along in the twilight, between Albano and Marino, I reached the gates of Rome. With careless brilliancy the bold moon was rising over the tombs of illustrious or forgotten dead upon the Appian Way, making these sepulchral mounds gaudy as with borrowed silver. We passed the well-known ruins, against whose desolation my sorrow of a day seemed petty, yet would not cease aching. At the Colosseum I quitted Lucio and his wine-barrels, traversed the side streets that lead to the Piazza Venezia, and so onward to Finocchio's lodging-house. I was always welcome there. Vanni put never a question to me since I had discovered Tiberio, but to-night he seemed in a flutter of anxiety.

"Has anything happened? Any visitor called?" I asked him when I had given such vague explanations as might account for my coming at an hour so late, without baggage, and with the pedestrian's dust upon me.

"One has asked to see you not two hours ago," he replied in a whisper. "Carluccio—he would give no other name. That was enough, he said. He will come again to-morrow—at night."

"The very man," I exclaimed joyfully. "But is he no acquaintance of yours, Giovanni? Did you enter into conversation with him?"

"Eh, Singor mio, am I a chiacchierone—a chatter-box? Shut your mouth, and the flies won't get in. The blind man gets home with a stick. Too many eyes, my granny used to say, turned Messer Argo into a peacock. Giovanni is blind and dumb, unless to inquire what your Excellence would have for supper. Basta!"

"You have every reason to be so, Vanni. I praise and envy you. Nevertheless, when Carluccio looks in to-morrow, if I am out, keep him till I come home, though the clock should be striking midnight. And did he give you none of the signs?" I concluded.

Giovanni put on an appearance of utter vacancy. "Niente, Signore," was all he said.

In the morning, as early as Roman custom would permit, I was with Finocchio outside the door at which, long ago, we had rung in the Palazzo Annibaldi. My thoughts at this juncture, when I could attempt no more directly for the protection of Roccaforte, were fixed on its great ally, the Cardinal Ligario. He might succeed where I had failed. I must lose no time. Events were marching fast; a few days—or hours—might work irreparable disaster. So I took my Neapolitan friend as an advocate with the Cardinal's servant, his crony, Masillo. Well that I did; otherwise, with the Oriental nonchalance of his tribe, that slumbering Cerberus would have left me to kick my heels in the antechamber until I was half mad, and then go away, my business no more advanced than when I came.

To Finocchio his countryman was open. "Eminenza will not come back till evening," he said. "He is gone with a party of illustrious forestieri to the Villa Borghese;

then he will be driving with them. Your Excellence," turning to me with a low reverence and fingering the notes I thrust upon him, "you must put wings to your feet, like the marble boy with a straw hat one sees in the galleries"—such was his accurate description of *Hermes petasatus*—"then you will come upon the Signor Cardinal in the casino of the Villa. He would be lecturing to those ladies on styles of art, pictures, and I know not how much. He admires the beautiful, does our Cardinal Marcello."

I scarcely heard the end of this declamation, flung over my shoulder as I ran down-stairs. A *legno* took me, through lines of vehicles and the crowd which is a feature of renovated Rome, down by the Babuino and under the Porta del Popolo into the green seclusion of the Borghese Gardens. At this hour none of the ordinary visitors were strolling about those pleasant walks. I drove to the casino, dismissed my conveyance, and with an indifferent gaze traversed the rooms, in which I could not hear sounds of dialogue or the movements of a company. Had the Cardinal left before I came? These vacant-eyed marble figures tantalized and oppressed my mind. Yet how beautiful some of them were! Ah, in that little chamber ahead people are stirring, and a deep voice echoes. It is Ligario. Will he receive me?

He was erect, with hand uplifted and thumb and forefinger joined—the teacher's attitude—in front of the group that made a centerpiece to this cabinet—Apollo chasing Daphne, who is already half transmuted to the laurel as the god lays hand upon her. Three ladies and two gentlemen, French to the finger-tips, were gathered round the Cardinal as he talked in his strong nasal accents, a smile on the swarthy red countenance, which resembled so closely that of Julius II. His French, though correct, was something marred by

the Italian breadth and music that took away from its crispness and blunted its epigrams.

"This work of a boy of eighteen, Bernini," I heard him say, "is a splendid improvisation. Perhaps it attempts what should never be done, to give sculpture that element of the picturesque—the anecdote, so critics term it now—which is proper to painting. Ah, well! it is alive, nevertheless, a real poem. See how terrified, how preterhuman, Daphne looks! She is no longer the maiden of flesh and blood; she is the nymph or hamadryad who has caught into her veins the wildness of savage things; in spite of his eager pursuit, Apollo will get for his pains only a handful of laurel-leaves. Such, my dear ladies," he concluded with a smile, "is the reward of poets. They write sonnets to your ladyships, but their bride is Fame. We say that better still in Italian, 'Fama e fame'—is it not true?"

By this I had edged my way quietly round to him, and on turning the Cardinal saw and recognized me. I believe, indeed, he was already practising for a loftier station, in which it is thought of great moment never to forget faces. He held out a gracious hand. "Whence and whither, Signor Utopian?" he said pleasantly, with an immediate reference to the conversation we had shared—how long ago! "Do you still dream of Paradise on this side of Lethe?"

His French companions fell back while he was speaking. "Eminence," I answered, "I beg a few minutes on business which is not Utopian, but most sad and serious. I come from Roccaforte."

He was attentive immediately. "From Don Gaetano?" he inquired.

"On his behalf, at all events. But," looking significantly at the visitors, "I cannot speak here. Will your Eminence deign to walk with me a short way into the garden? Five minutes will suffice."

He reflected. "Your demeanor tells me there is something in the wind. I will go with you—yes—to the medieval ruins, it is a secluded spot. My dear friends," raising his voice, "have the kindness to meet me in the gallery up-stairs, before Raffaele's 'Entombment.' I will be with you in ten minutes."

We were soon threading the shady walks, fragrant with a thousand odors. Until we reached a clear space I kept my lips closed.

"Now we are quite alone," said the Cardinal on arriving near the sham medieval castle, "speak, and have no fear."

I spoke, but I had more fears than I could avouch to this high political churchman, whose line of conduct was necessarily unknown to me, and his motives a secret. That he never would ally himself with Tiberio Sforza, or with any that dipped their weapons in assassination, I could well believe. But how far he might wink at excesses, not sharing in them, the effect of which would be revolution and the pulling down of the Cross of Savoy, was perhaps more doubtful. The Italian, Guelf or Ghibelline, has been a waiter on Providence for so many hundreds of years that he cannot give up the game in the turning of a hand. Therefore, I must alarm the Cardinal by appealing to his affection for Gaetano. I did so. I represented "the Count" as a leader of anarchy, strong in the Camorra—and here Ligario questioned me how I knew, but I told him straight out that I would not answer—strong also by reason of his great wealth, and determined to combine in one movement all the malcontents of whatever color. A conspiracy was starting among the soldiers; Gaetano had been solicited to act his part—to draw in the Catholic officers and get ready for the day of barricades in Rome or Milan. Moreover, he was falling into the snare.

"You are assured of that?" inquired the Cardinal, bending on me his contracted brows.

"Sure of it, your Eminence. I know the tempter and the man tempted. I have heard them discuss the matter. Given a revolt anywhere, Gaetano, if you do not instantly take him away, will be implicated."

My words threw the Cardinal into a deep study. "You advise me to remove the young Prince out of this man's path? But, sir," turning with an eager glance, as if he would pierce into my brain, "have you not some design in all this? What is your relation to the Count? Are you friendly with Gaetano?"

"I think Gaetano as heroic a spirit as ever lived. The Count is what I say. For myself, your Eminence calls me a Utopian. Be it so. I want no revolutions made by murder. And I implore you to rescue the Sorelli from this subtle fiend."

His thoughts left me again; they were fetching a wide compass. "It is true," he said at length, "the Church abhors violence; she condemns all secret associations. What could we not have done, as Tertullian remarks of the first Christians, had our maxim not been rather to let our own blood be spilled than to spill that of our enemies? But all these years—Signor, observe it well—not once have we conspired against the powers that be. There is no Catholic Freemasonry, no preaching of sedition in the pulpit—nothing but patience with a firm expression of the rights which we claim. Even you, an Englishman, a Protestant, will own so much."

I made a sign of acquiescence. "But Gaetano, will you insist on his leaving Rome—nay Italy? There is not the faintest hope for him, unless he puts the Alps or the sea between himself and the Count."

Ligario pursued his argument. "No violence, I repeat—no conspiracy. Well, but how if Providence put its hand to the work? Signor, in Europe at this elev-

enth hour of the century I see only two powers standing. Know you which they are?"

I waited for him to answer himself. "They are the Church and the Army. Parliaments, as Gambetta told the French Chambers, are a collection of jockeys and horse-doctors"—he stopped to relish the description. "As for kings, if the soldiers turned against them, I pray you where would they be? But soldiers are no longer hirelings; they are the people. And there is a natural alliance between the soldier and the priest. If your Count has seen that, he sees far."

The big voice had sunk under the weight of reflections that carried in them all the future. I, too, was aware of the portentous consequences which must follow upon the drilling and arming of the nations. It could not be an everlasting parade.

"Will you, then," I said, "look on while Gaetano cements that alliance with his blood?"

"God in heaven forbid!" exclaimed the churchman. "I tell you frankly, my dear journalist—you may report me if you please—I have not one ounce of trust in United Italy. All history cries out against it. I believe in federation—small states, local independence, and the Holy Father President of our Union, which would look up to Rome as its capital. Should this ever come to pass by the action of Army and people, how could we refuse to welcome it? But it must come without conspiracies, by the free growth of popular opinion. We have nothing in common with anarchism. I cannot allow Gaetano to perish."

His mind, during this colloquy, which had taken us backward and forward in the narrow space, had been arriving at some definite conclusion. "Ah, I have it," he said. "In a few days I start for Vienna, where duty calls me and will keep me many weeks. I want the help and counsel of a layman in Sorelli's high posi-

tion. He shall go with me. For the rest, be not anxious, Signor. I know how to convince him of the wisdom that lies in moderation: that is no new doctrine of mine."

"Your Eminence will not mention my name?" I said, preparing to take leave; "it might frustrate your most specious arguments."

"To what purpose should I mention it, my dear sir? It is the situation of the country, not your eloquence, however persuasive"—with an arch smile—"that warns us against throwing away, in a mad and criminal attempt, the fruits of twenty years' patience. Addio, figliuolo," as I kissed his ring, "you have my thanks and my blessing."

So one stroke had gone home. Now for the other.

At every turn, hitherto, my trouble had been that I could not aim a blow at this monstrous capobanda without exposing his victims to a deadly wound. Did I bring him face to face with Gaetano, that impetuous St. George would out with his sword—*flamberge au vent*—leap forward to the chance-medley, and—as was all too probable—perish in a combat where he would be attacked from behind. The scheme which now shaped itself in my thoughts was hazardous, but promised to succeed. I must get evidence other than my own that Sforza had been a partner in the crimes of Santa Fiora. Proof in hand I must approach the highest powers of the Kingdom, and compel them to break up the association of malefactors to which I traced the calamities of the House of Sorelli.

I had yet no means of judging how far Prince Camillo was entangled in Sforza's nets. But my remembrance of his timid and melancholy expression gave reason to surmise that he endured Tiberio rather than shared in his projects. There might be some likeness between

the son-in-law of Scanza and myself. Had we not both slipped inside these meshes unwittingly? That was my hope. Most surely the dreams of a widespread anarchist uprising would have little charm for a Liberal statesman, nourished on patriotic aspirations such as had culminated in the "Italia Una" and the "Roma Capitale" of 1870. My conclusion was that I had now to win over Carluccio, making him King's evidence against the manutengolo, and that I would go to Camillo, and, if he were slack, to the throne itself, never resting until this iniquity was ended with Tiberio's downfall.

On reaching Finocchio's I saw that something had happened. Giovanni shivered in all his limbs as if the Roman fever held him. On that sunny day his teeth chattered in his head. His mild, brown eyes had grown larger; and twice, while attempting to lay the table, he let the plates fall with a crash, beholding the ruins in a mood of passive despair. Luckily we were alone. "Mio caro Vanni," I said, "you had better tell me what is the matter. Dove t'e cascato il somaro? Where has your donkey fallen down?"

"My donkey, indeed, Signor!" he cried in a taking of fear and exasperation, "mine, indeed! say rather yours, Eccellenza—that devil's brat and imp from hell, Carluccio. He is the somaro that has tumbled, and—with reverence—you will find him between your legs. Oibò, che bestiaccia d'un brigante! Why did they send him to me?"

"Then Carluccio has been here?" I said with severity. "Let the plates alone, Vanni; tell me what passed between you. To begin with, did you know more about the lad than his name? Now, no romancing, my good man! Just the plain, wholesome truth."

"Wholesome, you call it," he answered ironically. "Better for you, Signore, to believe my romances than

to hear his beautiful truth. Did I know Carluccio? I never saw him till he came here, so help me Sant' Andrea e tutti Santi, but the signs passed"—this was said in a whisper—"so I understood he was a picciotto—what you say in English, a prentice lad."

"Indeed? Apprenticed to what trade, Giovanni? An honest one, I hope."

"It is no time for joking, Eccellenza. You know as well as I do that the trade we mean is the Camorra. When I was a little boy, they had only a handful of Romans, Tuscans, Lombards, in the sect; but now, since it has got into the Army, it is not Neapolitan any more, but Italian. Much good may it do them! Carluccio is from Marino—which is not the gate of heaven. He has a fair face and a black heart. Don't trust him."

"Well, but his errand? Why did he come after me?"

Giovanni laid down plate and napkin, stood in the center of the room, and burst out, "Signor, I am the most unlucky of mortals—a lizard in the mouth of a snake—a pan of chestnuts roasting on the fire—and what do I know? The errand was—oh, yes, very polite, very amiable—that Eccellenza would have the extreme goodness not to leave Rome until he heard from Messer Carluccio again—with a plague on him. That all? A little more. That Eccellenza would do well to keep in the house until this youth gave him permission to leave it; or at least would not go anywhere alone, but always in company of Giovanni Finocchio. Servo suo!" He made me an ironical salute. "Something more yet! That the picciotto was exceedingly sorry, but his orders would not allow him to wait until Signor Ardente returned; but in Giovanni Finocchio he left one who would follow you like a shadow. And he kissed his hands to you—the whelp. Are you satisfied now?" My host fell into a paroxysm of prayer and imprecation.

"Give me a few moments to reflect," I answered. "You think Carluccio a traitor?"

"What else?" said Vanni; "a smooth-tongued, lying villain, that wants to put upon me the credit of assassinating you, when he has done it himself. The trick is an old one. I am seen with you everywhere; then you are found dead, perhaps in the Via de' Tre Ladroni, or in the Val d' Inferno, beyond the Porta Angelica, and who but I held the knife? Ah, give me Carluccio's throat here; I would show you how it is done!"

"How did he know I was coming here again? Did he say?"

"He said—lies or no lies—that he, as a piciotto, had been told off to keep an eye on the Signor Inglese. That now he had other business, and he would put the watching on me. But that on no account were you to leave Rome or have any dealings with the Government. 'Tell him,' said this tarantula—may he choke with his own poison!—'to keep still and do nothing—to live in the picture-galleries or in the catacombs, until he hears from me again; or he will be pulling the devil by the tail. Tell him that.'"

"You could n't guess which devil, Giovanni? It might make a difference if I knew."

Finocchio gave me a glance of saturnine humor. "Whose tail have you been pulling these six months gone?" he inquired. "You are looking ill, wasted, the ghost of yourself, Signor—and all because you would not harken to me the first night you arrived in Rome. I think you should be acquainted with that tail, per Bacco! Take care of the horns now."

While he ran on, my mind was clearing. Carluccio had been probably nearer than I imagined during the last days at Roccaforte. His visit to Finocchio was a signal, not a menace; whatever happened, I might reckon upon him in the enemy's camp. Should I take

his warning? Without him I had neither evidence against Tiberio nor means of getting news from the Monti Lepini. But I could invoke the aid of Camillo and the Government. Yes—and immediately there came hurrying across my imagination a number of horrible stories—true ones I knew them to be—the blood dripping from actors and victims—in which, as soon as the military appeared, the brigands drew their knives and made short work of the hostages. My situation was beset with alarms and ambushades. But I came to the decision which my young bandit recommended.

“Be it so, Giovanni,” said I, resignedly. “One word, and let us have done with it. You shall be my jailer; I will neither write to the authorities nor call upon any of them. Give Carluccio that assurance from me. To-morrow morning let us begin the round of the picture-galleries—in which the atmosphere is not so close, I take it, as in the catacombs. And now to the macaroni! Is it as tasty as usual?”

“Tastier than you will get from Tiberio,” he grumbled; “but pazienza, I say nothing. Bocca, non parola. Love God and leave Satan to cook his own dinner. You are too bold, Signor; you may reckon on what you Englishmen call a dessert, and we Italians merenda—just what you deserve for taking such pains to feel the coltello in your ribs. And so, God be with us. Another plate, Signor? In the flash of a dagger!”

CHAPTER XXI

SAN PIETRO AT MIDNIGHT

DURING the days that followed, while no Carluccio came, and some great unknown event was hanging over our heads, I used often to fancy myself the one inmate that could not slumber in the palace of la Belle au Bois dormant. I went wandering about its galleries and corridors, sat by its fountains and listened to the plashing of their waters, searched up and down for curiosities in every nook; and still the briar-rose trailed as in a neglected garden its branches through the windows and doorways, the silence would not quicken into life, and all things, as though eyeless statues, suffered me to pass nor would make any sign. Condemned to mute expectation, I should have fretted my nerves to fiddle-strings, at which a music pizzicato and vehement was always plucking, had not the strange, high melancholy of the marble-world of Rome subdued me to a peacefulness I might have sought elsewhere in vain.

I never shall recall the time without wonder, nay without delight, heavy as I felt in my sorrow at the loss of Costanza and Gaetano. What would be their doom? It was beyond conjecture. Yet if unhappy, as seemed the way with creatures so fair and delicate, mine would be a lifelong grieving over them, so mighty a hold had they seized upon my heart which lived,

absolutely, in their remembrance. I was made for their love. And a cloud of perils encompassed them; yet I was sauntering listlessly among old Greek gods and the painted fantasies of all times, the idlest man in Rome. It was an extraordinary situation, the like of which I would not inflict upon my worst enemy—no, not upon Tiberio—to be waiting thus, a passive spectator, while the arena was getting its fresh sand, the beasts were unchaining, and the last act moved forward from the spaces beyond. Enough; “*ce jour aussi passera,*” said the luckless Damiens on his way to execution—one of the deepest words ever uttered by human lips.

Finocchio, with a wild eye and a quaking heart, went wherever I took him. He left the house to be cared for by another of his paesani from Avellino; but every morning, before we set out on our travels, he gave directions how to find us without loss of time. In the galleries Giovanni would remain at a distance, absorbed in his own thoughts, which mostly ran on the chances of the next lottery; he was always murmuring figures and consulting omens. But he never let me out of his sight. I began to realize the terror which, from time immemorial, has weighed on the Italian spirit, above all in the South, where spies or police have gone prowling on the track of the citizen day and night. I was never alone, never at liberty; followed in all my gyrations by invisible eyes. There seemed to be some one lurking behind me who was sure to disappear when I turned round, or to assume the shape of my poor, harmless Giovanni the moment I looked for him. Such a tension on the nerves might have broken down a stronger man. But at this point the Greek gods and heroes came to my relief.

Ancient sculpture has always affected me like music, but not as the highly colored, deeply shadowed modern

harmonies which, in their melting of many tones together, leave one vibrant, yet exhausted, as after some passionate experience. No, rather like the fine, clear settings of Palestrina, I should say, which fall upon one out of a cloudless heaven. When I spent day after day, contemplating in the still palaces this divine company from Olympus, or Thebes, or Thessaly, the intense and shining quietness could not fail to equalize the pulses of my blood. It was the expression of a beauty in which sense had little share. I call to mind certain mornings at the Vatican, when I seemed to have those imperial courts and stanze to myself. The universe, I could have dreamed, was white sunshine—no refraction of its rays anywhere; but standing out fair and pure the deathless forms, each so individual, so consummately distinct, that they seemed victorious over mortal griefs by the very perfection of the attitude in which they fought and triumphed. There was a strange innocence, too, upon the youthful faces; by a miracle of art the flesh itself had all the tender purity of blossoms in their prime; gaze long enough and you had gone back to the world's childhood, when the spirit wrote its naïve desires upon a tablet of Parian marble, unstained as the snow which breath of man has never sullied. These figures had a kind of consecration, a detachment from our sorrows, that lifted me, like the tragedians' verses to which they so frequently took my thoughts, into an ever-enduring stillness beyond time and chance. So it was that I did not devour my own heart as the weeks lengthened—ah, into what perspectives of uncertainty!—and the stage was empty yet.

A long three weeks! I had ascertained, by means of Giovanni, that Cardinal Ligario was gone from Rome; I could not find out whether he had taken Gaetano Sorelli. Desperate expedients began to fling their shadows over my path—one in particular, of which I

cannot tell, even at this supreme moment, whether anything will ensue. At last a message was brought me—two days ago, an eternity since! I was wasting an hour in the Museum of the Capitol, Giovanni keeping watch with sleepy eyes, a figure at once comic and touching, doomed to the task of Argus, which with him was no labor of love. My excursion through the rooms had terminated, in obedience to the instinct that was always driving me back to Roccaforte, at that fine relief of Perseus setting free Andromeda, which may be seen in one of the vestibules. There was I, mocking myself with bitter comparisons—when and by what spells should I win my magic horse, my sword of light, or the good luck of this radiant youth against the monster from the sea? I chafed at my own helplessness. But next I saw Finocchio's half-closed lids unfolding; he started up, took something from a hand outside my vision, and came to me almost with a spring. I tore the envelope which he thrust upon me, and read. It contained only these words, made up of printed letters cut from an Italian newspaper and pasted into a sentence, "Be on the steps of St. Peter's without fail, at eleven to-night." Not a syllable more. But I did not need to ponder. I would keep that appointment. . . .

I was there to the minute. Passing over the great square, I scanned with eagerness every night-stroller like myself, of whom there were not many, and these discernible as black dominoes under a moonless heaven. The colonnades stretching far on both sides intensified the gloom, which was strangely checkered at intervals by lines of silver and softly pulsing crimson streamers, shot from an *Aurora Borealis* in the sky overhead. This apparition came and went intermittently, a ghostly presence, beautiful and weird, the beams of which sometimes mingled with the white descent of the fountains,

and would again strike upon the awful vastness of the dome, there to be quenched like sparks in water. The effect of all this, in my trouble, was a tingling, prophetic mood, as if I had taken wine before some bold adventure. I ran hastily up the broad steps and looked along them. No one there. The mighty doors were shut; the church was wrapped in slumber. I paced to and fro, thinking a thousand heavy thoughts, conscious, by second sight, of the view that St. Peter's would present now, were I on the other side of those massive portals—the immense chiaroscuro of walls and roof, with their million colors; the statues posing in their niches theatrically; the lights burning low before shrines and altars; and away in a dim distance, the swarm of golden flowers, a crown and a garland of yellow blooms, forever kindling about the Apostle's resting-place. Distinctly I could see, on the marble floor of the Confession, that suppliant attitude of Pius VI, where he kneels in prayer, symbolizing the ancient Christendom, its pride at once and its humility. This presence, unchanging, stayed with me through the next hour. The building had taken to itself all the glory of the Book of Revelations, and was become of fine gold, as it were glass, transparent and impenetrable. I was aware of its surpassing magnificence; I could not enter and worship; only the beauty itself gave me a kind of strength even to remember it. And thus I waited.

But not long, perhaps. The bells of St. Peter's had chimed out once and again; I continued my uneasy walking over the wide pavement; and quietly there glided forth from the colonnade a tall, cloaked phantom, who approached me in silence. I did not dare to speak. Lifting his hat and replacing it instantly, Carluccio addressed me through the gloom. It was he, as I had anticipated; but nervous and full of fears, trembling so desperately, that, when I took his cold hand, he clung to

me with the passion of an infant. I was for drawing him in among the giant pillars from the blackness of which he had emerged, but he would not let me.

"No, Signor," he said in a whisper, "on the steps, then we cannot be overheard. It is safest here," and he led me to the central gates of the Basilica. I held his hand fast; this untutored soul would surely be open to my influence if I willed it strongly; on him I now hung as my last hope.

"What news?" I asked in a whisper like his own.

"Bad news," he replied briefly, "but, oh Maestro, I am putting my life in your hand. You will not betray me?"

"Carlo mio," said I, leaning forward that he might have some glimpse of my features beneath the Aurora which was glimmering above, "shall I swear it? Tell me how to make you sure, and I will."

Even in his terror he had smiled. "No swearing; it is the word of an Inglese; we know it binds him better than an oath binds us. Master, I have come as soon as I could. Forgive me if it was not sooner. Ah, the bad news I bring you!"

"From Roccaforte?" I said, overcoming a sickness that made me reel and stagger. "Tell me all, I can bear it. Where is Don Gaetano?"

"I don't know. He went away nearly three weeks ago."

"With Cardinal Ligario then," said I; "but if your evil tidings are not about him, are they—do they concern Donna Costanza? Good God, tell me whether she is safe!"

Carluccio's hold on my wrist grew tighter. "Signor caro, you love that lady, do you not? I was often close to you at the Rocca, and I saw many things. Livorno told me off to spy upon you; he did not think I was your dog, your creature, always devoted; he set me as

a shadow behind you. But always there, listening, inquiring, eyes and ears alert, I began to know that you adored Donna Costanza. So—was it not?"

"And if it were so, *piciotto mio*, how then? Is your news dreadful? Do not spare me. Above all, make haste." The suspense, I thought, was killing me.

"Let us walk up and down," said the young man, "else an eavesdropper may come creeping upon us. You shall hear it all. Stop me, if you do not understand."

Arm in arm we began our slow promenade from one end of the pavement to the other. "I am not a sharp lad," Carluccio muttered, "but still my brains are not made of bran. The master—let us call him so, for names echo loud—put me as sentinel at the Rocca on his own account; but I made a vow that I would be there on yours. Now there is a page of his we call Ascanio; you have seen him?"

I made a gesture of assent. "Quick, on with the story."

"He has the wit and the malice of ten thousand devils. We were friends, all the same. I got from him that the master intended to drive you out of the castle and to take your place in Don Gaetano's heart. How? By lying and false witness, to be sure. But Ascanio, who did not come about the paese often, saw less than I. For I knew, and he did not, that the master was—be patient, Signor, I entreat—was mad, I say, about this same lady—*fieramente innamorato*. For God's sake, cry not aloud; you will be heard at the obelisk!"

I had uttered a wild exclamation. "He, mad about Costanza! The crawling reptile!"

"Yes, a reptile, but with poison in his fangs. Oh, I tell you, insane with love and jealousy; *la rabbia*! furious as a bull! What could you do against him? Did not old Candia tell you to drop the game? Were those letters of Santa Fiora not enough? Nor those

burnings and slaughterings at the casino? But you would never take a warning. Then the Neapolitan, Lucera—”

“What of him? Surely he had no hand in the plot! Do you mean to say that when he fired at me out hunting, he was in it?”

Carluccio interrupted me: “Ah, and so he fired at you? I did not hear of that. No matter, he was your enemy, as others, because of the malocchio, as they chattered—”

The youth ended with some embarrassment; but I laughed, and he began once more.

“I knew they would drive you out; I was certain you would go to Finocchio’s. He is one of our bond-slaves—caught, like me, in a peccadillo, a bit of poaching, when an infant—never let escape afterward. There are many of us, believe me. But, you say, to the tale. A month ago two things happened. Donna Costanza sent away Marchese Sismondo with his coxcomb awry. Ascanio spoke to you; and, presto, you were gone that very day. Did you think it was not known? But we were watching from all windows; so, as you came not at the dinner-hour, and all was trouble and confusion, the master sent me on a swift horse into Rome, and I arrived at Finocchio’s before you.”

“But why did you not wait, the next day, until I came in? I left the message expressly.”

“It is true. I was longing to meet you, Signor. Only I had his orders—my hands full—he was sending me elsewhere. Instead of mine, he gave you into Giovanni’s charge. No, not because he suspected me. I think it was this way. The lads are often a bit rough; young colts mostly they are—you can’t trust them with—with the fair sex, *le buone donne*—you know. He fancied I was the sort to be in attendance on Donna Costanza.”

A flash seemed to strike at me out of the dark. "But, man, where is she? Don't torture me with your talk. Is Donna Costanza at the castle?"

"She is not, nor has been these ten days," said Carluccio, gloomily. "What is more, when I left my service of the Principessa, she was in Livorno's hands, a helpless prisoner. Where she is now, as I am a living man, I cannot tell. Signor, have courage! Will you faint here, on the steps of the church?"

I set my teeth; would I faint?—No, by God above, I had something else to do. "Then the villain has carried her off?" I said, with a fierce grip of my companion that extorted a cry from him.

"Worse than that," he answered, in a low voice.

"How?—worse? You don't mean that he would—" My tongue refused to utter it.

"I mean that all the people about Roccaforte say *you* have carried her off; and some say she went willingly. And her good name!" he whistled it down the wind. "They blame the old Prince now for letting her run wild; troppo santa non viene mai a fine buono! You may be sure the wise men are shaking their heads and saying, 'Buon cavallo e mal cavallo vuole sprone; e buona femmina e mala femmina vuol bastone.' But it was all old Candia's doing. A witch, a brigand, and a blackmailer—did one ever see a trio more diabolical? I not, at least."

"Let me hear everything," I urged, when I was a little recovered from this horror. "A prisoner—in Tiberio's power! But he could not seize her in the open day. How did he contrive it?"

"With the cunning of seven devils. First, he made friends with Lucera—who is a great piece of a fool, saving your presence."

"Yes, I give up the Marchese. A fool. What then?"

"That fool, flying from the castle in a mighty passion, is persuaded that the lady will elope with Messer Ardente—for she is in love with him, and how else should they marry?—she a Princess and a Catholic, he a heretic and what know I? Now, suppose the Marchese himself took her away and married her? Can it be done? Yes, with the help of Santa Fiora, it can."

"Who was marauding in the woods," I broke in, "when Lucera rode away; for I saw him."

"You did, and I saw you. It was a game of hide-and-seek; only you did not hide much. Exactly. There was Santa Fiora; a few hours afterward he was making out a pretty little plan of bird-catching at Velletri with Signor Sismondo—of whom I say once more, an idiot, a natural, to put his trust in banditti. However, not the first time! Did they not do it often—those great nobles—so I hear say—when they had the world to themselves? Bene, it is agreed. Santa Fiora steals the lady, but so as to let suspicion fall on you; therefore, not in a minute—not until it would appear that Lucera was clean gone out of the country, down to Foggia, having no more hope of the marriage. When you are fled, and the neighborhood is quiet, the bird may be enticed out of her nest. That would be Candia's business, acting as a decoy."

"In all this Livorno does not appear?"

"He is nowhere to be seen, but acting at every stage. You shall hear."

We were now resting against the closed iron gates. My mind had leaped over the intermediate story to Costanza's peril at the hour when we talked; but unless I knew, I could not advance a step. Carluccio must tell what he had seen in his own way.

"Signor, impatient as you are," he continued, "I spare to tell how this trap was laid. Till Gaetano went nothing could be attempted. He was a lion in the

path. No wonder; he had killed two of ours at Monte Majella!"

My frightful mistake stared me in the face; I had removed Costanza's chief protector. Yet again, had I not done so, the conspirators would have caught him in their toils. Was there any escape for him between the devil and the deep sea? I could think of none. But my young bandit took up his parable now with undisguised relish.

"It is not easy, Signor, to arrange un sequestro," he resumed cheerfully. "You must have the devil's own wit, and some luck—but luck is everything in this world. And when it is a woman! But we knew the mountains; we had friends in every paese; we could choose the hiding-places we thought secure; and there was Candia, who hated you always, and would kill you, and Costanza for so much as looking at you—since Livorno pointed you out to her as Renzaccio's assassin. He did so the day after you disappeared."

I drew a long breath. "Ho capito, I understand. Suppose your preparations ready, what followed?"

"The days are long now; only a few hours of the night would serve. We could not take the lady unless she was some distance from the castle, alone, and unsuspecting. She passed many hours in chapel; they saw her seldom outside the courtyard. She had given up her visits of charity. All the same, it was managed. But, of course, the master had left Roccaforte, and all there enchanted with him; you know what a man he is. He went off. But—just ten days ago—Candia's husband, Pasquale—he is a match for the wife—was dying; oh, but dying as you never saw any one die—in his holy agony. It was late, nearly as dark as this; the afflicted strega sent up word to the castle—would Donna Costanza come down to him? She had often come down before, so she threw a cloak over her head—the poor

innocent!—came down, with Ser Angelo stumbling sleepily after her, and was going into Candia's bottega—you remember it in the Vicolo dell' Oca—when a small troop of bersaglieri appeared from heaven knows where. You can imagine, Signor, what sort of bersaglieri! In a minute it is done. A sack is thrown over her head; she is lifted on horseback; Ser Angelo takes a hurt he will carry to his last confession; and away goes the squadron, clattering down the stony roads and off into the mountains. Follow them, carbineers, quick! Aye, do, and catch the wind of their driving in your faces. As soon as they were fairly out of the neighborhood they doubled back; took ways known but to the peasants; and dispersed, all except three or four. I was one of the chosen. I nearly forgot to tell you that they seized Nonna Candia, too, as maid of honor to the Princess. It all went like a play, I give you my sacred word."

Until he had finished, no syllable came from my lips. Then I took Carluccio by the throat. "You young ruffian!" I cried, half throttling him, "you dare to tell me you had a part in it? You shall never leave this spot alive."

But wiser thoughts prevailed with me the next instant. I could not afford the luxury of murdering a mere instrument. His life was precious to Costanza, and I loosened my grasp, while the fellow, shaking himself like a dog, crawled at my feet. He was not indignant, hardly surprised.

"You have reason, Signor," he said humbly, gasping out the words. "It was a villainy. But what could I do? Run away and give information? Never any good to give information! Come here to you? Before the thing happened, what difference would that make, since you could not help? Now I come as soon as I get the chance. Forgive me!"

I had no alternative; I must forgive the lad. "Up, and don't lie there," I said, choking with the emotion that came over me. "On one condition I pardon you—you will take your oath to help me in hunting down these two miscreants? Swear, I say."

He put his finger to his lips solemnly. "I swear by our Madonna—the Madonna del Carmine—to do your bidding, Signor. What can I do more?"

"Even should you risk your life? Carluccio, you pledge yourself to me and to the Madonna, come what may?"

"I pledge myself," he answered, taking the hand which not many moments earlier had been strangling the life out of him, and kissing it.

How was it possible not to forgive such a child of nature?

"But the Princess—tell me what she did. How did she take this vile handling?"

"Like an angel, Signor mio! Even at the first horrible stroke she neither screamed nor swooned. You must know that the sack was taken off as soon as her captors had ridden out of the village. I was not one of them, don't think it. The party wore masks; Santa Fiora kept always by her side; we others joined them at a place fixed on previously. In all the riding and racing Donna Costanza would never be able to tell by what roads she was carried off. But except the terror, no harm was done. When I saw her at the journey's end, in the deserted farm-house, at Le Pergole, she was calm as a statue, praying—praying every moment. Ah, had you seen her then, you would have kissed her footsteps!"

I did not imagine this to be false, or said by way of soothing me. In a great horror of darkness Costanza would have been rapt, by the very shock and astonishment, out of this lower sphere. I knew the miracles that

her spirit could achieve; and when—if not amid accidents so frightful?

“Then did Lucera meet you at Le Pergole?”

“Oh, Lucera!” exclaimed the youth, breaking into a laugh that he checked immediately. “He was finely taken in—diavolo gabbato! the devil in his own cage—we say—catch and be caught. Well, it is true. The master himself brought Lucera up through valleys and mountains to Le Pergole; it is a big, old, rambling house, una masseria, with rooms above and below, cellars, and winepresses—would shelter an army; and, the *fattore* left it all to us, and went for a holiday. Tutto proprio, Signore! Donna Costanza would not be served better at home. Candia, the witch, made a bella commedia of the capture—crying millstones out of her wicked old eyes, playing the drum with her crooked fingers, and oh, what a bad world it was. I told her it would be worse if she did not stop caterwauling and sleep in *santa pace*. All she wanted was to frighten her young lady—like the *Jannara*, the limb of old Satan that she is. Ah, Santiddio, but I gave her a fine fright!”

“Well, but Lucera? You say Livorno brought him.”

“Ay, that he did. Persuaded the *cavaliere rusticano* that he would find his bride prompt and pleasant at Le Pergole, and a parish priest in his stole; and that with two words the *clandestino* would make Donna Costanza his loving wife. Oh, how we did laugh when the poor innocent came tramping into the yard, big voice and orders to everybody; we all running as if it was a Vesuvio—a *carbineer*—on horseback. The Princess and her guards were in another wing—a quarter of a mile away. Then he dismounted, and Livorno after him. But Santa Fiora—when they were both inside, the bolts drawn, and all as our *manutengolo* had ar-

ranged—off with the capobanda's hat—a low bow—and 'Signori illustrissimi, a thousand pardons, but—you are my prisoners!'"

The remembrance was too much for Carluccio; the young brigand shook with laughter, until I could hear in his voice a nervous choking. "Ah, but the Marchese—the Vesuvio!" he repeated. "How superb he was! And what a fright overtook him when Santa Fiora put him under guard, and he was led, shivering and shaking, into the large underground catacomb where he had to spend the night!"

"He never saw Costanza! Came to no interview with her?"

"Never once. She, indeed, asked a hundred times for him; since it was her belief that he had planned and executed the abduction. But no one went near her apartments except Candia and me. I had my orders. Livorno himself did not sleep at all that night, but stalked up and down like a specter. So the play went on till the third day. By that time, Lucera's proud stomach was brought low."

"What do you mean? Had he given up his claim to the lady?"

"Yes, and more. He was willing to write as Santa Fiora dictated to his steward at home—there was a pretty ransom in prospect, which we all intended to share. Livorno would take none of it this time—generous, was n't he? That settled, the masked riders appeared on the scene after dark—last Monday night, just a week ago—invited Donna Costanza to mount without violence, which she did, and commenced their journey in the direction of the Gran Sasso. At a proper distance behind them rode Livorno with a couple more of our men. I went along, also, for several miles; I managed to say one word to the Princess; then turned off by the master's order, and rode back to Le Pergole.

There I was kept busy until yesterday, when they sent me into Rome, and here I am at your service."

"But what has become of Costanza? What does Livorno intend?"

"I cannot tell, except that he never will give back the Princess but on his own terms. Rather than that, he will stick at nothing—murder would be the least of his revenge."

"And the Marchese?"

"Will be ransomed and set free—when the play of Donna Costanza is played out."

We talked another hour until I knew all Carluccio had seen and heard. His fears waxed greater as the night sped on. This open space under cover of darkness alone had seemed to secure him from his confederates. "But I don't care if Giovanni is told," he concluded, "for like me the poor soul wants freedom; he is sick of Livorno and his masnadieri. Have you any way out of the pit, Signor? Show us and we climb up after you."

"There is no way but to inform the authorities," I said at the end of my long meditations. "I shall require some forty-eight hours to put in execution a part of my plan. That done, you and I, Carlo mio, will pay a visit to Don Camillo Sorelli, the Minister of Grace and Justice. Oh, you need not shake all over; we have to face death, and better in a good cause than aiding these devils. Courage, lad; be a man."

"I will—I will be brave—a malandrino should not be a coward. I come to you at Giovanni's. Swear it, you say? There, it is sworn." He repeated his vow to the Madonna del Carmine; and we parted with a clasp of the hand.

Since then, I have done nothing but put together from the fragments and half lines of my diary this

chronicle, which I intend to lay before Cardinal Ligario, telling him all things as they happened. Giovanni will see that his friend Masillo forwards the papers immediately to Vienna. Is Gaetano with him? Carluccio had no tidings of Roccaforte since the abduction; but he was sure the old Prince, stunned by his daughter's disappearance, would be slow to call in the public officers, as dreading the horrid reprisals that might be taken, for which there were precedents more cruel than any death. If, then, I persuade the Cardinal of my innocence all through these calamitous days; if I show Tiberio in his true character, we can at last join forces against him. But Camillo must be won over, too. It is incredible that he should have any share in crimes and treasons so unnatural as these. He cannot resist the evidence we shall lay before him; more is yet to be had, perhaps, if my other design succeeds, of which there is now no time to speak.

I have done. In a few minutes my young bandit will be knocking at the door. Then we go forth, danger on every side, death possible from a hundred lurking-places. I look round this poor little room—who knows whether I shall enter it again? All the while I have been writing, a single image, clear as in a mirror, has remained in my sight—Costanza's pale face, foreboding what may happen. Yet I feel a boundless confidence when I think how her spirit is wrought up to heroism—how she has ever moved in a world of angelic purity and divine courage. Heaven grant she may be true to herself!

There is Carluccio. I seal my packet instantly; hand it to Finocchio—it is my life, I shall tell him, that he is carrying—and now for Tiberio! What will the end be? I know not—except that he or I must go down; which of us it matters little, provided Costanza be saved.

BOOK IV
THE SUN GOES DOWN

CHAPTER XXII

INSURRECTION

WHEN we passed into the streets, I became aware that some unusual stir was filling them—men and women were streaming out from every side alley, and contributing to swell a current that flowed in the direction we ourselves were pursuing. A hollow murmur, as of words exchanged passionately and echoed back from twenty different sounding-boards, rose upon the air, indistinct but menacing and atrocious. The crowd was mingled of all descriptions, and a certain ragged regiment, ill-favored, unsavory, and fierce in its tattered wretchedness, went along with men decently attired, shoulder to shoulder, as if some common cause had this day swept distinction of ranks into the pit, and all were equal that marched under the banners of the Regions, displayed on high in a straggling column.

“What is all this about?” I inquired of Carluccio, pressing forward to get in front of the mob, which was heading for the Piazza Colonna.

He replied in a low aside: “Have n’t you heard the news? It came early this morning.”

“No; what news?”

“Great battle lost in Africa; six hundred of our soldiers killed; five thousand taken prisoners. The Romans are out of their senses with rage; quite rabid—

look at their faces. These are going to the Colonna to demonstrate against the Ministry."

My companion spoke in snatches, pausing between to wave his cap from time to time and shout, "Viva l'Italia! Abbasso il Ministero! Viva l'Armata! Al diavolo Scanza e consorti!" Such were the cries around, which my bandit copied and improved upon with a gusto as hearty as it was embarrassing to a man bent on my present business. But the marching column took up that lusty refrain, and gave it an accent that pierced the ear like some shrill and murderous pipe. I could make out not one single cry of "Evviva il Re!" It was the Army they acclaimed, not the King.

And as the stream gathered force, and enthusiasm mounted, Carluccio, the improvised fugleman, led a chorus of tumult, in which "Abbasso Scanza!" was the prevailing note. I dared not stop his mouth, lest the populace, turning on a foreigner, should rend me by way of preliminary to their feast of vengeance. But I cursed the Southern rabbia—the mood at once savage and cowardly—that is wont to seize upon these natures in a day of passion. There was my wild young Apollo, his hair streaming, his eyes lighted with sudden fire, yelling out these death-cries, heedless of all besides. He had forgotten Tiberio, thought nothing of our conversation on the steps of St. Peter's, was oblivious of the oath he had sworn; and now he swept me along with him in the mob that rushed down the Corso and invaded the Colonna, shrieking out of its ten thousand throats, "Viva l'Armata! Scanza giù! Vendetta!" The bearers waved their flags and banners frantically. At their approach, doors were closed in terror, shutters hastily put up, and itinerant venders fled in all directions with their wares, like sea-fowl before a storm.

There seemed to be no leaders in this chaotic dance.

Every Region, I thought, must have leaped into riot by an overmastering impulse, without waiting for orders—who, indeed, was there to give them? Yet, after a deal of incoherent clamor—when the piazza could hold no more, though fresh detachments kept coming on—individuals were seen pushing their way toward the quaint emblematic standards that rose like masts above the heads of the multitudes; and these men were well dressed, resembling the type of the *avvocato*, the schoolmaster, or the journalist. I caught some popular names; I heard it whispered around me, “*Ecco i Socialisti*; they will be preaching to us soon.”

But while the rostrum was getting ready, a young fellow, in the uniform of an artilleryman, sprang upon a table in front of the Emperor's Column, and began to pour out curses on the civilians who had sent his comrades to perish at the hand of blacks in Abyssinia. The storm which this boy's eloquence evoked beggars description. He had evidently slipped out of barracks to follow the procession, the young rebel—would he be shot for desertion? But his voice was broken with sobs; it could not frame itself into coherent speech; and as he stood up, panting, gesticulating, turning his swarthy, handsome face now to this side and now to that, in attitudes which seemed to implore a brave soldier's death for his brothers in arms, instead of the treachery that had led them to be slaughtered by barbarians, the crowd were kindled to a passion of pity and horror. They took him to be the visible embodiment of their Italy, pleading against traitors; his inarticulate sentences were drowned in applause, in curses, in cries of vengeance. Poor lad! He was not more than twenty, slender and delicate in appearance as just out of school. How many of the six hundred lying dead beneath an African sun, far from mother, sister, and sweetheart, resembled this youthful warrior! He was

willing to die, but not to be dishonored. The Roman mob, fiercest of city mobs in Europe, felt with him, but he could not point out a victim on which to wreak their indignation; and his fitful outcries were but a prelude, setting them to the key of murderous energy, yet waiting until some mightier musician should raise his baton over the chaos. A Socialist orator, taking the young soldier's hand, began now to make a text of him. It was still to the tune, "Abbasso il Ministero"; but it went on a bolder theme, "Morte a Scanza!" I seized my chance, dragged Carluccio out from the weltering confusion, and when we had got clear of the crowded streets, rushed on with him to the Via Venti Settembre. When we arrived it was empty of people. "They will come this way all the same," said Carlo, pointing to the Ministry of War as we passed it; "had n't we better wait till to-morrow?"

"Not an instant," I answered, urging him along. "To-morrow there may be no Government. Let us make sure of Camillo without delay."

The guards had been doubled at the Quirinal, in front of the various Ministries, and doubtless all over the city. We could hear as we ran the galloping of more than one detachment of cavalry on its way toward the Corso. How would it be at Camillo's door? I had made up my mind what stratagem to employ, so that, even in an hour big with public issues, the Prince should be compelled to an interview. Reaching the portone, we observed that its great gates were closed; I took this for a favorable sign; Camillo must be at home. Carluccio rang the bell long and loudly. A terrified face appeared inside the wicket; a voice warned us to go about our business. I answered that my business was with the Minister; that it was urgent in the extreme, thrusting at the same time an envelop through the bars, which contained my supplication as coming

from Tiberio Sforza, whose name I wrote in full, with his assumed title underneath.

The porter disappeared. We remained outside, anxious and uncertain. For the sounds of a growing agitation were coming up the wynd, and it was conceivable that the mob, if disturbed at their speech-making in the Piazza Colonna, would be marching over the Quirinal steps and taking possession of this street where the Minister held his office who was directly responsible for the war. Some minutes elapsed; then the small aperture was cautiously unfastened and admission given to us. The Prince was in the large saloon which looked out on the street. He would see me. "And my friend too," I added; "we come on the same errand." The porter looked doubtful; but we darted past him and ran up the stairs.

When I entered the saloon, Carluccio following, I perceived that the Prince was not alone. Standing at the window, which opened on a balcony, the stout form of Signor Scanza darkened daylight. He did not turn round or give heed to us; his attention was fixed on the sounds, every instant adding to their volume, that came up hither like the growling of distant thunder. Camillo advanced, bowed, and motioned me to a seat. He sank down in one opposite me, and drew a deep and painful breath, his cheek flushing and paling alternately.

"I remember you as an English journalist," he began with no slight embarrassment; "you came here one evening with the Count. Do I understand that you bring me a message from him?"

"Not at all," was my reply. "The message I bring is one he would be the last to send. This young man," pointing to Carluccio, who smiled with great simplicity on being mentioned, "was till a few days ago in Santa Fiora's band. He will tell you, Prince Camillo, what

Sforza has just done; after which you will act as your conscience, which I know is that of an honorable man, may dictate."

"What has Sforza done?" stammered the Prince, speaking low and glancing toward his father-in-law, "what has he done?"

"He has taken your sister, Donna Costanza, by force into the mountains, my Prince," said Carluccio; "she is there in his power at the moment I address you."

"My sister, Costanza! Taken her—holds her in his power! Madonna mia!" murmured the unhappy man, divided between amazement at this undreamed of news and fear lest the Prime Minister should overhear it. "Come this way—this way—for God's sake!" He pulled aside a curtain, and led us into another room. "Now tell me the plain truth," he said sternly to Carluccio; "if you add one word of falsehood—mark me—I have power to send you to the galleys."

"Send me there when you catch me in a lie, my Prince," answered the lad jubilantly. "The Signor believes me—he is an Englishman—so you may."

"I am certain he is telling no lie; but you will have proofs in abundance when he is done speaking," I said.

"Then be sharp and out with all you know," exclaimed the Prince; "I have long been an invalid; I cannot bear suspense. This morning, too—! Speak, I say."

The young man, helped by questions from Camillo or myself, told his story without hesitation, in less time than would be imagined. It bore the seal of truth on its front. But its effect on the Minister was overpowering. "The villain! the damned, heartless villain!" he muttered, again and again, while the blood seemed to forsake his heart. At the end he was trembling violently, and could not speak. We sat there, appalled

by his weakness, yet not daring to call in the great man whose presence in the saloon was now audible by frequent exclamations, as if he were watching a spectacle in the street below. The distant thunder had come closer; a confused movement and sound of voices filled the air as with the vibration of some powerful machinery. But Camillo, thrown back in the seat which he had taken while listening to my companion's narrative, seemed hardly aware of what was happening. His features were livid; his breath came in slow gasps.

"My poor father!" he said at length, making an effort to recover his self-possession. "Alone, you tell me! Gaetano at a distance; perhaps deluded into some plot, of which there have lately been threatenings—nay, which is breaking out—you hear it, Signor!—in sputterings of rebellion at this moment. My father struck desolate—son lost, daughter ravished from him! What can I do, merciful heavens?"

We were interrupted by several messengers who had come flying down the road, and now mounted the stairs without asking permission. They had been despatched from the Ministry of War, from the Quirinal and other official quarters, bringing verbal entreaties or advices to the Premier, who was known to be at his son-in-law's. The house which had been silent echoed to many voices. But over them all rose and roared a storm-wind bearing toward us the popular tumult. Never before had I listened to sounds so strange, so preter-human; their high shrieking soprano sang in the blast, penetrated to every corner of the mansion, died away only to begin again. Curiosity swept us all one way, the Prince, Carluccio, and myself—the men who had just arrived, and the secretaries whom Scanza was summoning about him in loud, angry tones. We entered the saloon confusedly together, and crowded to the windows. But in front of us all, undaunted, stood

the old Sicilian, an opera-glass in his hand, which he frequently bracketed on the concourse of Romans now rushing hither and thither, some to the Ministry of Finance, others to that of War, uncertain which to attack, but resolute in finding a scapegoat for the late reverses among the chiefs of the Government. And still they cried, "Abbasso il Ministero! Morte a Scanza!"

From our windows, which almost looked, as I have said, on the British Embassy, we had a complete view of the street and the mob that now held it from end to end. In the Piazza Colonna they had appeared to be destitute of leaders; since then a word of command had been somehow given; for, despite the surging to and fro, there was an attempt at military order. "The ruffians have soldiers among them," said Scanza to his son-in-law; "look how they are falling into line. If they could get a few rifles, we should hear the bullets whistling about our heads. Fools! do they want a state of siege? I would have spared Rome that indignity; but sangue di Cristo, they shall have it, once we are out of this!"

He began to give orders aloud, not stirring from the balcony, while his secretaries noted them down or sent the most urgent through the telephone—there was one in the saloon—to heads of departments. "As long as this infernal masnada only screams and bellows," he said, "we will have no shooting. Ah, you Roman mob, when were you ever loyal? You are still the dregs of Romulus, accidente to you!"

A mob not very picturesque, but gaunt and grim, as it moved with sudden bounds, incited by conflicting emotions, between the two Ministries and up toward the Royal Palace, not determined yet whether it would appeal to the King for Scanza's dismissal or attempt something on its own account. The sentinels on guard

—brave young spirits—paced backward and forward as if nothing were to be dreaded from the seething multitude around them. No other military had appeared in the Via Venti Settembre. And every vehicle having fled as the rioters came on, there were wanting materials for a barricade which might hinder the people from being taken in the rear, as they moved farther and farther down toward the Porta Pia. Scouts came and went; it would seem that the leaders were expecting some intelligence; and while the vociferation and the movement continued to increase, I observed how the banners of the fourteen Regions were taking their station, as if to afford a center round which the rank and file might group themselves.

Singular enough, these heraldic devices, which go back beyond the age of chivalry to the Roman legions—nay, for aught we can tell, to the Seven against Thebes. There were the three long rapiers of Trevi, disposed horizontally on their shield; the hillocks of Monti, likewise three in number; the crescent of the Field of Mars; the bridge of Ponte; the wolf's jaws of Campitelli; the wheel of La Ripa and the winged griffin of Parione, with all the other quaint or mysterious emblems whereby the Roman people has chosen to signify its pride in dominion and its passion in revolt. Some flags, too, had been seized out of churches or sacristies, and were borne along, having embroidered on their fronts the images of the saints, the Madonna, and the heart of Christ, with prayers interwoven that jarred exceedingly on the rough music to which we were listening. By a stroke of irony, one tall figure in a mask bore aloft the Turkish flag stolen, no doubt, from some community which sheltered itself in Rome beneath the protection of the Sublime Porte. Strange and splendid to gaze upon, that silver crescent and the morning star, displayed on a purple cloud soft as the dawn! Per-

haps it was carried in mockery, as betokening the defeat of Christians by a barbaric half Mohammedan power. Near it drooped on a staff the flag of Italy, its tricolor veiled in mourning. And this significant heathen banner now, at a signal, commenced to lead the way toward the house in which we were assembled.

"Abbasso i Ministri! Morte a Scanza!" All other cries were swallowed up in this.

"The Roman dogs," muttered the Premier, as he saw them coming. His color mounted; and now he stood silent, the rest of us falling a little behind him, so that he seemed to be alone, a solitary figure, looking down in contempt on the thousands who hurtled forward, as yet ignorant that their scapegoat was found. Then one caught sight of the well-known features and yelled to his neighbor; I saw the shock pass like electricity from soul to soul, along all the waving lines and to the very extreme where fresh waves came tumbling; and a cry rose to Heaven, frightful as the roar of a cataract.

But Scanza held his ground. They were making ten thousand missiles of his name and hurling them into the man's face. "Scanza, Scanza! Siciliano! traditore!" The clamor should have struck him senseless in its enormous violence; yet he did not budge. All eyes were on him now; all mouths agape, jaws set to devour the common enemy. They shrieked at him a hundred times the name of that disastrous battle-field; they varied it only with coarse epithets, or made it sting with the addition of a charge more odious than treason; crying repeatedly that he was a thief as well as a merchant of their soldiers' blood; asking what he had done with the gold of the Banca Centrale. I watched the Minister to see whether he would flinch before these handfuls of mud; but no, not a muscle quivered. How unlike Don Camillo, half prostrate on a couch, his lips dry, his eyes glazed with sickly terror! At every fresh

insult he, poor devil, shook in our sight. Nevertheless, knowing what a message we had brought him not an hour ago—that his ancient house was dishonored, his sister in the grasp of a villain—who could refuse to feel for the man, stricken with so many wounds, face to face with a catastrophe that must hurl him and his friends from power?

I approached him. "Don Camillo," I said, "will you let the Prime Minister be murdered?"

He regarded me with haggard looks. "Murdered, no! How can I help it?"

"Persuade him to leave the balcony. There are men in the crowd with arms which they will use presently. Up, I implore you; get him away."

While I was arguing the point, a message came through the telephone and was handed to Scanza. He paled slightly on reading it. "Gentlemen, his Majesty has arrived at the Quirinal," he said, "and requests my presence. I must obey. As I cannot reach the Palace without having this street cleared, I am now going to transmit an order for the advance of the cavalry. I take you all to witness that I do so under compulsion, not of free choice. The King's service takes precedence even of the lives of a Roman mob."

He smiled grimly, and gave the orders where he was standing, exposed to the tempest of imprecations which had never ceased from the moment he was observed by the rioters; but now I felt the supreme crisis had arrived. "Signor Minister," I said, going up to him, "you will surely not embarrass his Majesty and precipitate a revolution, by making yourself a mark for assassins. Is it not your duty, as a loyal servant of the Crown, to spare it the consequences that will follow—on your murder? Permit me to lead you from this spot. It may otherwise become infamous to posterity, and associated with the last hours in Rome of the House of Savoy."

The Minister heard my speech with astonishment. "You are English," he muttered; "you have a cool head." He stepped back into the room, or rather was pulled into it by a dozen arms; the next instant a volley of stones came from below, and every pane of glass fell in fragments. Camillo ran distractedly to the Sicilian. "Are you injured?" he exclaimed, "oh, day of misfortunes! The world is going to pieces!"

"No, no," answered Scanza, roughly shaking him off. "Why should I be injured? A finimondo, you call it? Eh, who knows? If I had my own way, it should not be the end of my Ministry; I would make these Romans dance first."

We could no longer approach the windows, now gaping as if rent by small shot. The destruction effected and Scanza's hasty disappearance had done something toward quieting the mob; although we could distinguish loud and sinister cries, of which the most frequent was to bring fire and burn the great gates of the mansion. Would these miscreants have time to carry out their threats? I made no question that once within the palazzo they would finish the day in blood, nor leave a soul alive when their hands were busy at the old work of slaughter from which they had never been weaned. On our side, we possessed neither arms nor the means of escaping. It was an absorbing ten minutes that followed. Luckily, in this street of stately buildings, the materials for a conflagration did not exist; they would have to be conveyed from a distance. A few shots were fired at random; twice the room was struck, the second ball shattering a huge mirror above the fireplace. But we had retreated to the inner apartment, keeping silence now, though with a concentrated fury which our looks, if I might argue from the faces around me, expressed more eloquently than any words. The telephone was still within reach; it announced a reply to

Scanza's message before many minutes had passed. And soon, the fierce discussion at our gates took a new and to us a welcome accent. There were cries not only of indignation, but of alarm and terror. "The soldiers are upon them," shouted Scanza, darting to the window once more.

The tide had turned. A magnificent sight it was, that charge of the horsemen with drawn swords, advancing in a line that swept the Via Venti Settembre, like a wave crested with foam, moving on swiftly, driving before it the broken columns—men and women uttering cries of despair, the banners shaken, tossed hither and thither, and finally going down in a rush and a scramble, as though the cavalry were trampling on them. Yes, down went the ensigns of old Rome before these rough-riders from the North, in whose eyes wivern and dragon signified no more than the once imperial letters S.P.Q.R. which decorated arch and temple as the merest of arabesques. From our coign of vantage we beheld a flight into all side streets, and over garden walls, of the braggarts who within one short half-hour had been threatening us with fire and slaughter.

They seemed cowards too deep in grain to provoke bloodshed; as they ran, the horsemen beat and drove them with the flat of their sabers; but all was not so to terminate. Here and there an arm, bolder than the rest, leveled its weapon at the oncoming detachment. Into the summer atmosphere a white smoke puffed; we heard the "ping! ping!" of more than one discharge. Though aimless and sudden in this headlong flight, the chance bullet told; a horseman fell from his saddle; another tumbled sidewise. There was an instant swaying backward of the mob against their pursuers; but these, lashed into rage when their comrades had fallen, now galloped furiously into the masses, and did not spare the saber's edge. Men fled for their lives, crying,

"Misericordia"; we saw bodies trampled under foot; others were badly wounded. In not many minutes the Via Venti Settembre became a solitude. But from afar we could hear the noise of the captains and the shouting.

A squadron of cavalry drew up in front of Don Camillo's palace. Signor Scanza was at liberty to wait on his Sovereign; and a carriage and pair emerging into the courtyard, he took his seat with an ambiguous expression on his flushed features. In the middle of the road, distinctly showing on the blocks of lava, lay a purple stain: nor was it the only one. His journey to the Quirinal would compel the Minister to dye his wheels in that crimson. He looked earnestly at it, then turning to Camillo, he said with suppressed fury, "It is all over; we have ceased to reign. Manco male, if these pretty stains had darkened the flags of Palermo! But Roman blood—spilled on the sacred stones of the capital! Ah, ragazzo, you will have to surrender your portfolio before the Ave Maria. Well, we made a good fight for it."

He drove on, the mounted men before and behind, as if he were a king out for an airing, not a minister whose day was going down in eclipse. I thought him the strongest of latter-day Italians, without scruple and without fear. Yet this man had been doomed to fulfil that prophesy of Tiberio Sforza's, which he uttered when we were calling for the first time on Prince Camillo. Near the entrance to the Ministry of War lay a pool of which no rains would wash out the remembrance. I thought how the Sicilian had acted up to his native proverb, "Wine is sweet; but sweeter is the blood of Christians." The explosion had come before its day; no Tiberio was there to make it a first step in revolution. But during those hours of earthquake the Monarchy had been shaken, and I knew that

Scanza would be thrown to the people lest others should fall.

Camillo, turning to go in, laid a finger on my sleeve. "You will not desert us," he said mildly; "I have a word for this giovanotto," looking sidewise at my brigand.

"Certainly we shall not last the day," he resumed, leading us to a chamber which overlooked the inner court. "I must make you acquainted with documents that are likely to pass from my keeping. We shall be undisturbed here."

He was interrupted by a spasm of pain. "It is the heart," he said apologetically; "I must ring for a cordial." When he had taken it he addressed me with a faint smile. "You think me little better than a poltroon, I dare say. But in my youth—ah, thirty years ago—I was headstrong, proud, and dazzled by golden hopes—an enthusiast, as you may be to-day. I quarreled with my father; I took the side of the people, from which I have never swerved; but was foolish enough—I pray you mark—foolish and wicked enough to join the subterranean lodges. For the sake of freedom, I sold myself as a slave. From that day I have not had one hour of liberty or peace."

"Can you not free yourself at last?" I said. "Roccaforte is at the mercy of this vile Camorrista."

"I mean to do so," he answered, a gleam on his pale face. "In any event I have not long to live. But the documents of which I was telling you—let me get them."

He went to a great desk, touched a spring, and brought out of some secret drawer a bundle of papers sealed. "You know Sforza's handwriting?" he asked. I replied in the negative; no correspondence had passed between us.

"Here you will find he has anticipated the blow you would strike," and he began to unfold the papers.

"How, in God's name?" I cried.

"These are informations," said Don Camillo, "which he has laid before me, giving the name of every member in Santa Fiora's band, with an account of their crimes, a description of their persons and probable disguises, and the means of capturing them as soon as he should have got them safe into an ambush. I am waiting now—at least, when you arrived I was waiting—for a signal from the informer. Then we should have struck with all our might."

"Eh, for the love of the Madonna, let me see—let me see," ejaculated Carluccio, bounding on the documents with both hands. "Names, faces, rags, and all," he continued, his eyes lighting up amazingly—"we were to be caught, trapped, eaten by Livorno! What, all of us? See here—oh, Signor Ardente, look, look! My name—no wonder—but God in heaven, see here—here is Ascanio's name—the lad that adored his master, that could not be happy away from his heart or his eyes! Oh, what place in hell for such a devil? Ascanio—yes, read. 'A boy of fifteen, slight, very fair, coquettish in his dress, yellow curls and large violet eyes; seems only a pretty child, but full of stratagems; engaged in many robberies.' The master wrote that! He gives up Ascanio to the galleys! Oh, where can we tear the fiend into shreds? Let me discover him, my Prince; if it costs me my life, I go with you."

The pity and rage of my brigand were something beautiful to see—an impression checkered, as I looked at him, by fantastic visions of the page—the false Rosalind, saucily accosting me in green, donning the plumed hat to show in what scant regard I was held by Tiberio. But this quick passion flung a light over my designs. "You shall be saved, Carluccio," I cried, seizing him by the shoulder, "and Ascanio with you. Prince, you have partly guessed, I perceive it in your eyes, what I came to propose."

"A free pardon to Santa Fiora," answered Camillo; "it shall be made out, ready for signing, without a moment's delay. Whoever succeeds me will not, I think, be Sforza's accomplice, many of our politicians as are compromised by the dreams of their youth, or—the greed of middle age," he concluded with a sigh. The Banca Centrale had risen up to confound him when he thought of Scanza. I assented, and he resumed—

"A free pardon, conditional on his giving evidence that shall convict the manutengolo. He will understand so much. But how to come upon his traces? Must we wait until Sforza gives the signal?"

"By no means, Prince," I answered; "there is something else."

"Ah, you would tell me I ought to be at Roccaforte, where my father is solitary and helpless. Yes, yes. But you come with me—you and this young man. As soon as I have word of Scanza's resignation we will go together. Twenty-five years since I passed that gate! A quarter of a century! You know I never saw Costanza except at a distance, as she drove through the streets of Rome. Signor, I doubt if I should recognize my sister's face." There was desolation in his accents.

"One glance will scatter your doubt, Don Camillo—if you ever see her alive." To those fearful words I compelled my lips, but I had to clutch hold of the table as I uttered them.

"Get ready now," he said, rising. "Unless duty—imperative duty—keeps me here, we start this evening."

But I made a gesture of dissent. "Not yet, Prince. You forget this precious document. We must have evidence in our hands. The Duke will require it. First allow me to take a copy of the papers you have from Tiberio. I will beg of you to authenticate our copy with your seal of office. After that is done, give me twenty-four hours—you will probably be unable to leave Rome before to-morrow evening—and I may be

able to furnish all the proof we can desire, though Santa Fiora should keep out of our reach."

"What is your idea?" he inquired anxiously. I told him in half a dozen words. "Excellent," said Don Camillo, "but as I cannot leave you henceforth out of sight, I will ask some officers to accompany you in whom I can place confidence. Promise to send me word how you succeed at the earliest. Here is the traitor's list. Sit down and copy it."

In less than an hour it was done. I had a faithful transcript, sealed with the official seal of the Ministry, in my pocket, and after hasty refreshment, urged upon us by the Prince, we set out on the adventure which for three days past had been calling me. The long May afternoon was going down in fairy splendor, but we could still perceive on the blocks of lava in the Via Venti Settembre those dark purple stains, of which in the morning they had borne no trace.

CHAPTER XXIII

ASCANIO THE PAGE

OUR expedition led us along the stately Piazza of the Twelve Apostles; and we were passing by the noble Palladian church when a carriage driving toward us pulled up, a woman's gloved hand beckoned imperiously, and Signora Tarquinia called in her ringing voice, "Ser Inglese—one moment! What good fortune brings you my way?"

Carlo dropped into the background. I crossed to where the carriage was halting, and waited for the diva to begin. She had an anxious and troubled countenance. "Oh, these fearful times!" she cried. "I have just arrived in Rome from Porto d'Anzo—it was not easy to get in, they made such a garbuglio at the gate. Has there been a revolution? They tell me Scanza is overthrown; I see proclamations announcing the state of siege. And oh, my good friend, is it true, has Don Camillo's palace been attacked?"

"I was present when it took place, unfortunately," said I. The actress gave me a peculiar glance.

"You were there?" she echoed. "Unfortunate indeed!"

Her eyes fell, as by an instinctive movement, on the cameo inserted in her bracelet. I knew what it figured: the head of Medusa, which corresponds in its ghastly loveliness, yet by a transmutation as superb as

it is characteristic of the Southern peoples, to our grinning skull and cross-bones; an amulet, of course, against the jettatura.

"Unhappy house of Roccaforte!" said Tarquinia, not lifting her eyes. "Father and son estranged; and now this perverse affair of Costanza's, which may end in tragedy!"

"What affair?" I murmured. "Have you heard anything? Tell me, I implore you."

"You were present that day, too, Signor," she went on, her eyes fixed in contemplation of the Medusa; "but really—one would say it was fated."

"Do you mean the day Lucera got his congé, Signora? What had that to do with me? I left the castle almost as soon as he did."

"Quite so. Your part in the imbroglio is to me a mystery. Not that I should have chosen a Cherubino like the Marchese for that angelic creature; I never liked the match. But Italian girls are not expected to refuse their father's choice. I suspect it was your presence, Ser Inglese, that put these daring notions into the child's head."

"Thank God if it was," I cried passionately. "Do you know what happened afterward?"

The actress eyed me with some disquietude.

"I left them soon after the catastrophe of Lucera; have been yachting since with some of your grand English people. No, I have heard nothing. What are you keeping back? Is Costanza ill?" She peered into my face eagerly, undaunted by the malocchio.

"Can you be at Roccaforte the day after to-morrow?" I asked, endeavoring to keep down my agitation.

"If it were a service to Costanza I would give up every engagement," she answered in surprise.

"It will be. Cancel them all; try to arrive at the castle in the afternoon."

"But, Signor," she exclaimed impetuously, "you are hiding some trouble; I see it in those eyes of yours, and in your quivering lip. Do trust me—what is it?"

"You know nothing—guess nothing, Signora?"

She was ignorant, then, like all the world, of what had befallen her friend. The secret was well kept, as Carluccio reasoned it would be.

Tarquinia caught me by the wrist. "Tell me immediately. I will not let you go till I know everything. Is the child dead? Has she run away to the sepolte vive? You look the picture of despair, my good Englishman."

"Were she dead, I might be less miserable. No, Signora; she has been seized and carried off from her father's house."

The actress fell back on the cushions.

"Madre Santissima!" she exclaimed, while the tears burst from her eyes. "That bandit, Lucera!"

Yes, I saw it would be so; Tiberio had devised his stratagem to catch the common judgment. No use in explaining here and now.

"If Lucera's hand is in it," I answered, "he will repent his daring. Acknowledge now that your presence may be wanted at Roccaforte. On Thursday Don Camillo returns to his father's house; he has never been admitted since 1870. You can do much to reconcile them."

"And I will, that I promise you," cried the actress with intense animation; "but my poor Costanza! Does no one—is it impossible to get on the track of the miscreants?"

"Not impossible, I hope. I am following a thread which may wind into their very hearts."

"Follow it, Signor mio, follow it to the end, and God be with you. I won't keep you an instant longer. On Thursday expect me at the castle."

Tarquinia rolled away in her carriage. I rejoined my companion.

"Now, Carluccio, it is clear," I said to him, "that Sforza means to get rid of you all and turn over a new leaf. Let us see what Ascanio thinks of that. Behind us are those two officers in plain clothes on whom we rely in extremity—you understand me; you know how to get round this lad."

"Let me alone for that," replied the young man; "all I hope is that we may find him the other side of the wicket, waiting for his master, who, I guess, will be lurking about the Gran Sasso with the men he took away, and the lady—poor thing! Basta! we have no time to lose, Signor."

He went on before, to reconnoiter as we drew near the Palazzo Mocenni, which was the object of our journey. The coast was clear; I let Carluccio ascend the broad staircase of the huge, melancholy mansion where my first interview with the "King of the Camorra" had taken place. What would he discover in those chambers? A wild imagination flashed across my mind that perhaps Costanza was hidden there. Such things had been. Rome was more secret than the caves and shepherds' huts of the Gran Sasso. But who could fathom Tiberio's designs? All I knew was that the venomous worm would be undergoing some fresh transformation.

I stole noiselessly up the second flight of stairs when Carluccio gave a quiet pull at the bell. There was a click as of the little wicket opening; a cry of joyful surprise which I knew to be Ascanio's; a colloquy in smothered tones; while I gained the remaining steps with a wolf's tread, and in a few seconds should be at the door. Then I heard bolts unfastening, and a key turning; Carluccio was inside the fortress. Ah, a second cry, unlike the first!—a short, sharp struggle, and my

bandit called to me, "Come up, Signor; don't be afraid; I have got him safe."

A violent outburst of weeping and sobbing broke on the air. "Ah, traditore! figlio del diavolo!" and such-like imprecations I caught in the page's high, trembling voice, full of grief and terror. The gendarmes appeared below me on the stairs.

"Shall we come up?" they motioned. And I, "Not yet. Be in readiness when I call."

They waited respectfully. I passed in, and beheld Ascanio, struggling no longer, but deadly pale, half seated, half lying on the velvet couch, held in a firm grip by Carluccio. The latter was smiling, whispering words of comfort, doing all he could to reassure the saucy page, but tightening his hold whenever Ascanio tried to get loose. On seeing me the fair-faced boy shuddered and went off into a swoon.

"He thinks you the devil in person, God forgive me!" said Carluccio. "What a little viper it is."

I saw in his hands the marks of teeth.

"Do you mean to say the lad bit you?" I exclaimed.

"Altro!" said my smiling Apollo, "bit like a weasel—look here—never mind. Now, if you would have the goodness, Signor—water; we must revive him."

I brought some from Tiberio's dressing-room, which Carlo dabbled on the lad's pale forehead and golden locks with great tenderness. Meanwhile, I turned the key in the door, went through the rooms, and satisfied myself that they were empty. No Costanza there! Things were in order, as if they had not lately been disturbed. Should we find evidences of guilt underneath all this luxury—behind these pictures and brocades, or in the caskets of tessellated woods that served, perhaps, as repositories of Tiberio's correspondence? I was master now within these mysterious apartments; I would not quit them until I had explored their secrets.

Ascanio was coming round feebly, when I stood by the couch again. His eyes gleamed, and he tried to push away Carlo's hand which was still wetting his lips with the water. "Ah, Inglese—creeping villain!" he muttered, "what do you do here? Wait till my master catches you." He sat up, and looked around helplessly, and cried as I never saw any one cry before, with an agonized pain, a sense of bewilderment and defeat, that went to my heart. I dared not attempt to soothe him.

"You should never have got in, if this damned Carluccio had not told me lies," he said, half choking. "Where is your note from my master? And ah, Dio mio—where is he? I have not seen him, not heard from him—no, not so much as one syllable, these three weeks. It was because you spoke with his name on your lips—vile carrion—that I opened the door to you. Give me his letter then!"

Carluccio and I exchanged glances. Here was confirmation strong that Tiberio had mapped out for all his followers a scheme of death or capture. He was deserting this unhappy lad as well as the rest.

"Will you promise to keep quiet," said Carluccio, "until you have read it? There, take this handkerchief and wipe your eyes, you little fool. As if I was the man to hurt Ascanio! Did I ever hurt you before, somarello?"

"No, but you are hurting me now," moaned the page. "I *will* be quiet, only let me see my master's letter—my dear master, in spite of all!"

"Give it to him, Signor," said Carluccio—"ah, yes, a dear master; you will see."

"This is not the Count's handwriting," was his exclamation, when his eye fell on the papers I held out to him. "Get away with you, Englishman; you are so stupid you don't even know how to tell lies!"

"I did not say it was his handwriting, Ascanio," said

I, with a certain accent which made him attentive. "I am grieved, my dear lad—more than you will ever know, perhaps—at the pain I must give you"—for his dreadful crying was still in my ears like that of a forsaken child—"but these are your master's own words, faithfully copied. Read them to the end."

He did so, not now thinking to dart away from the couch, or to move at all, but with suspended breath and a face of dismay and horror. We stood by, uttering no word. When he came to Carluccio's name, he just looked up at him, and the tears glistened on his eyelashes. Then he went slowly down the paper, gazed long at the official seal, as if he were examining it; traveled up to his own name once more, and recited the account of himself in a tender undertone. "Si, si, that is me," he said; "'Ascanio, a boy of fifteen, slight, very fair, coquettish in his dress, yellow curls, and large violet eyes; seems merely a pretty child; but full of stratagems; engaged in many robberies.' Is that my thanks, Master?"

"Don't cry so; have courage; recognize your friends," I said, touching his hand. But he pulled it violently from me. "I knew something would happen," he said, looking on the carpet, and seeming to have in his mouth a nauseous draught, "when you spoke those horrible words to me at the Devil's Boulder. You prophesied that I should lose my master; now I have lost him. Not by my fault—Madonna!—if he had sent me to die, what matter? But to betray his own Ascanio!" He broke down again.

We let him take his fill of weeping; it was the only way. But Carluccio held his hand, and after a while that human touch affected him to more kindly emotions. "You were to die along with us," he exclaimed, springing up from the sofa, "and you came in order to save me, and I have not thanked you. Thanks now,

fratel mio," and with that he took the young man round the neck.

"Could you be so mad as to think I would betray you, Ascanio?" said the other, holding the lad in his arms; "were n't we always the best of friends? Now you know the Count. But for this English Signor we should be handed over—not one spared of us all—to the police. Don't you think he deserves your gratitude as much as I do?"

Ascanio glanced at me sidewise. "Let him order and I will obey," he said resignedly. "The Count is gone"—puffing him away with disdainful gesture, but breaking into sobs again. "Do you think to kill him, Ser Inglese? You have the face of one that would."

"Kill, and eat him afterward," exclaimed Carluccio, laughing. "Per Bacco, you have leave from all Santa Fiora's men; they would not refuse a collop of the cruel devil. Ascanio, yes—he shall yield up his life or the lady; by preference, both."

"How, what lady?" inquired the page, still conning the murderous lesson which he held at arm's length. "'A boy more like a child,'" he repeated to himself, "'full of wiles and stratagems!' Am I so? He shall taste some of them. What lady must he give back, Carluccio?"

"Why, the lady of Roccaforte—who else? Donna Costanza, you know."

I saw a trembling take hold of the slender frame, shaking Ascanio from head to foot.

"Costanza! Impossible! She was for the Marchese. I took the messages between him and Santa Fiora; I was there when they met in the wood this side of Velletri."

"All that might be," returned his comrade; "nevertheless, your Lucera is a prisoner at Le Pergole, if he has not paid his ransom; and his promessa sposa—

though she did not promise—may as well marry our noble Count, for he has kept her day and night in the mountains. He loves and she must love; it's the rule of the game," concluded the young man, airily.

I was struck with this naïve repetition of Dante's terrible verse—

Amor, ch'a nullo amato amar perdona,

which seemed to cast the shadow of death or infamy over the one woman I worshiped out of all the world. But on Ascanio the words wrought like madness. He neither sobbed nor wept any more.

"Now I see it all," he said, and a grave expression darkened the young face. "We were the Count's body-servants to snatch a bride for him—they did that in the old times, Carluccio, I have read—and when she was safe in his arms we might go hang or drown ourselves. More, he would get a price for us—so much a head. Don't you believe, Signor," turning at last and confronting me, "that Don Camillo was willing to pay it? I wonder how much I went for, a mere lad of fifteen."

"Well then, Ascanio," I said, "if you want to frustrate this wedding, give us all the information you possess. Did Sforza leave any papers that would compromise him?"

Hesitation on the lad's countenance—for which I gave him credit, though it must be vanquished. He stood irresolute; glanced at the document in his hand; flung it away, and said, "Come, I will show you."

We followed him into the dining-room. Books on the shelves not a few; heaps of journals on the ground; no sign of papers. "You must break open this cupboard," said the boy, "unless Carluccio knows the trick of it."

"Not I," answered the other; "I am no house-breaker."

"Then it will be one of my stratagems to open it," said Ascanio, smiling and shivering; "observe, I do thus with a bit of steel which some one gave me who was a master in opening locks. Now, Signor, take out what you find."

A heavy iron door had swung noiselessly on its hinges, revealing piles of square paper, which I began to pull out eagerly.

"Better take them in order," said the boy, "those at the top first."

I did so, and laid them carefully down as they came out. When I had extracted several in this way, "Open them now," he continued.

"Yes, certainly, I open them. But, Ascanio, look inside," I said with some mortification; "they are every one blank. Absolute white paper! What use is that to us?"

"And if you take them all out," he answered, "you will find only white paper. How shall you proceed now? There are no other documents in these rooms."

I snatched up one of the books and held it to the light. Transparent leaves with an Italian water-mark! "You are certain the Count left only such books as these?"

He assented silently.

"Did you ever see him write in them?"

Again a lingering hesitation; then his voice came in a whisper, "If I must I must. Signor, he wrote in them almost every day."

"Ah, I thought so, invisible ink. Bring a candle, Ascanio—or stay, can you light that stove?"

"No good if I were to light it," he answered; "I know all about lemon-juice and those kinds. This is different: fire will not bring it out."

"What will, then? Have you a stratagem for this?" I asked.

"Wait till I come back," he said, and was running out of the room, but Carluccio put his hand on the prisoner's arm.

"Not alone," he said, "my dear little captive. I am your jailer; I can't lose sight of you."

Ascanio struck him pettishly. "Va bene, come then," he cried, adding in his boyish manner, "Did I hurt your hand when my teeth went into it? Let me see," taking hold of it and putting it to his lips.

They walked off like the two Dromios, while I considered the cryptic pages that might unveil Tiberio at last. Certainly these did send up a faint perceptible odor of some chemical preparation. But I was almost an ignoramus on the subject of sympathetic inks; unless the lad's boast had truth in it, we must lose hours in conveying these documents to Prince Sorelli's and submitting them to experts. No, here is Ascanio, bearing with him a dark solution in a Florence flask.

"You will let me try my hand first," he said; "I have n't got much of this. We had better apply it to the last notes I saw him put down—these, I know they are." He took up a volume as he spoke, turned the pages out before him, and commenced brushing them with the liquid. After an interval, fragments of color became visible. They developed into lines and sections; but conceive my chagrin on beholding, not words in an unknown language, but signs as unintelligible to me as hieroglyphics!

"It is all in cipher!" I exclaimed, turning from the queer-looking page; "I am as wise as before."

"But I am a little wiser," cried Carluccio, to my relief and astonishment. "I know some of the words. It is the cipher of the Camorra. I was never any great things at writing in it, but I can read it."

"Then, for Heaven's sake, spell it out for me," I replied. "The night will be gone and nothing done. Ascanio, get lights, find some bread and wine, and let us all three run down this trail, now we are upon it."

A ring at the bell made us start. My companion and I were armed with revolvers; we went, therefore, to the door, but stood on one side while Ascanio opened the wicket. I caught the sound of inquiries.

"It is all right," I explained to the lad; "open without fear. These are friends, sent by Don Camillo."

Our gendarmes, in fact, uneasy at the long stay we were making, had resolved to see what was keeping us. I told them briefly, and they took up their quarters in the anteroom, while we, with lamps lit and food on the table, pursued our researches in cryptography. Had Tiberio entered any time during the next seven hours, the sight would have astonished him; we looked more like clerks in an office sumptuously fitted up, than three detectives searching into a great criminal enterprise.

It was no holiday task. "How did you come by that solution, Ascanio?" I inquired of the lad, whose eyes were now closing with fatigue and the weariness that follows upon violent emotions. "Is there more of it?"

"Only this much," he said, holding up the flask, which was nearly exhausted. "The Count left it with me, so that in case he wrote I should have the means of reading his letters. I have n't the ghost of an idea what it is, or where you can get a fresh supply. And oh, I am dead beat," yawning and falling with his head on the table, where the bright yellow curls went streaming over these pages that we were putting to the question. I spoke to Carluccio.

"Take the lad and lay him on Sforza's bed in the next room. He is quite broken with this day's work. We shall have to do the best we can while he sleeps."

"Broken?—no wonder," said Carlo, lifting his young comrade tenderly; "all the same, better that than being shot or sent to the Isola del Giglio. Come, you sleepyhead. Cospetto! he is as light as a feather."

With these words, he carried off his slumbering burden and disappeared into Tiberio's chamber. On coming back, he seemed thoughtful. "You would take that boy for one of heaven's seraphim," he remarked to me, "now when he is asleep. And awake, no urchin that ever played tricks in church is more mischievous. But faithful—as a thief to your pocket. Cosa stupenda, is n't it, Signor?"

"Let us get on, for God's sake. What do these dice signify with an arrow between them?"

"Oh, scusi, those are false dice! When we play in a locanda with a stranger, it is one way of starting a quarrel and getting the man outside, on pretense of a duello. Then we capture him easily."

"And this bunch of grapes?"

The youth glanced along the line. "That was the fat old beccafico at the Tor de' Schiavi," he said carelessly. "The rose underneath means that we did very well in his case. And so Livorno did; for he had most of the cash. You remember seeing it paid out by Santa Fiora in the pigeon-house."

From these instances it may be gathered how slow and unsatisfactory a process we went through, in our attempt at piecing out Tiberio's commentaries. The chemical solution was failing us. Large tracts of white though not virgin pages irritated our curiosity; sentences stared us in the face of which we could not make head or tail; even where several consecutive passages lay in our path, it was a chance whether my brigand would be master of the jargon in which they were composed, and I, as became an Oxford scholar, did not know one of these hideous characters. They revolted

me like a visible disease, a leprosy on the innocent paper. Nevertheless in them was hidden the evidence that we came to seek. Tiberio had kept, in single or double entry, the record of his dealings with the Camorra; but for himself alone, in phrases which no one else could fully decipher; a great part we must leave until experts had taken it in hand, to make what they might of it.

Two or three times my companion, reading over my shoulder aloud, as the signs became visible, dropped his voice, stammered, and pulled up like a terrified horse shying at some phantom that rose before him.

"What ails you now, Carluccio?" I asked.

He replied in a whisper, but not until he had satisfied himself that the gendarmes were out of hearing. "Comrades that have disappeared," he said in my ear; "I knew that one and the other. You don't understand the letters he has put after their names. No; but I do. They were finished by picchiotti—knifed to death. Livorno prays for them, see—Requiescat to each. The murdering hound!"

So much was certain. More important still those fragmentary pages appeared to be which we had first lighted upon; and now that our magic liquor was squeezed out to the last drop, I began to range the copies we had taken in such order as I could, and to extract their significance. Ascanio slumbered on; Carluccio threw himself on a sofa and fell dead asleep. From time to time one of the gendarmes looked in, by way of assuring himself we had none of us flown through the windows. And what, in this solitary session, did I read?

Some curious disclosures of vanity and ambition. Among the leaves there was a pedigree, made out with extreme care, in ordinary speech, wherein Tiberio Sforza, by the father's side descended from the Royal

House of —, on the mother's traced himself through twelve generations to the Baglioni, Lords of Perugia. How much was genuine, how much feigned? Impossible to say; but he had given names, marriages, and dates with an exactitude worthy of the College of Arms, and perhaps as well founded.

Then followed, but in a doubtful and broken series, a correspondence, made up of letters originally separate, which had been stitched into volumes, written in a great variety of hands, but all with the same sympathetic ink, and signed with names purely fantastical. Who the signatories were, Carluccio had no means of informing me; they belonged to groups with which Santa Fiora did not stand in alliance; either what is known as the *alta Camorra*, or else—and this seemed the more probable,—political and military associations. The language, I thought, was that of soldiers, often of educated men; the allusions thrown out, the hopes expressed, and some of the measures indicated bore a resemblance not to be mistaken, and strengthened by my knowledge of similar writings, to the literature which, half a century earlier, had proceeded from the *Carbonari* or the *Mazzinians*. A fresh movement had sprung up, as I heard Sforza explaining in his conversation with Gaetano, of which the Army was the chief center and himself among the leaders. What could be its design? An Italian republic—a military pronunciamiento? In any case, the new order of things was to be one which would give him wealth and power. It might even be conjectured, from hints dropped by more than one correspondent, that the rising would not tarry long. Discontent was growing from Milan to Palermo; the Socialist newspapers talked open rebellion; if barricades were thrown up and one single regiment fraternized with the people, there was an end of the present rule—King and Parliament would be swept

away. It struck me, as I went on reading, that the disaster in Abyssinia, which had overturned Scanza, might, by coming before these conspirators were prepared, have saved the Monarchy. But, in all this, I was supremely thankful not to meet with the signature of Gaetano. I hoped it was nowhere among the undeciphered documents; it was not in those I had gone through.

The sun looked in at eastern windows while I went on studying. One of our gendarmes had left; another taken his post. I began to realize that we three were prisoners. What did it signify? These papers with my transcription of their meaning must be handed over to Don Camillo. To him they were at once despatched by a messenger in waiting.

CHAPTER XXIV

AMONG THE VINEYARDS

ALL now hung on the movements of Prince Sorelli. How many hours would this wretched Ministry take to be cleared out of the way? Impatient and full of forebodings, I waited in the Palazzo Mocenni with a heart almost as sad as Ugolino's, when he heard the bolts drawn at the gate of the Tower of Famine—every moment was lessening the chance of freedom and safety for Costanza. Before eight o'clock we were up and about in Tiberio's rooms, gathered round his breakfast-table, uninvited guests. Ascanio, serving me instead of his master, smiled with a curious expression of pain, as he recalled the last morning I had eaten and drunk there. But the rites of hospitality, the sacred bread and salt which I had tasted, must yield to something more sacred still. We were paying treason in its own coin. My other young brigand enjoyed himself with trembling. "What if he were to leap in upon us now!" he said more than once, glancing toward the door.

"He would be welcome," I answered. "Is it not extraordinary, Ascanio, that he leaves you all this while without orders?" The page was about to reply, when we heard a peculiar ring. Carluccio turned white and ran to hide himself behind a tall desk, drawing his revolver at the same time; and Ascanio, like a dog to which its owner whistles, sat up, his ears erect, all at-

tention. "Who is there?" I asked, holding him by both shoulders, lest he should rush out suddenly and discover us. "You must n't be afraid; the gendarmes are there; the bolt is on the door."

"I know, I know," he gasped; "yet if it is the Count—O Dio!—he will make his way in. We shall be under his feet in an instant."

"Never, while I am alive," I said. "Now go, Ascanio; be careful; but first I say a word to the soldiers."

Until the wicket should be opened, it was impossible for any one outside to know what was going on in these chambers. I walked therefore into the vestibule, and cautioned my gendarmes that whoever came in they should immediately pinion him; but that, first, the lad who was with us would hold a parley. They quite understood, drew on each side into the heavy curtains, and allowed Ascanio to undo the wicket. I watched him from inside the saloon. His face, which was swollen with weeping, told me instantly that the visitor was not Tiberio Sforza. "Why did you give the master's ring?" he asked angrily of the newcomer.

We heard a quavering voice reply, "Because I come from him." At that Carlo and I pricked up our ears. "That is Luigi's voice," said my companion, in a whisper.

"Where is he then?" inquired Ascanio. But the other—Luigi, if it was he—laughed with a foolish kind of snigger, and said, "How should I know? He sent you this. Take it. I am in a desperate hurry."

Through the bars of the little wicket he pushed a letter, and was going away, when I made a sign to the gendarmes. "Open," said one of them to the page. He obeyed at once; and no sooner did the messenger come in than he was pounced upon. He uttered a feeble cry. "Gabbato, I 'm caged," he whimpered. "Signori, don't hurt me."

"We are not going to hurt you, *bestia del diavolo*," cried Carluccio, appearing from the other room. "Don't be afraid; you look as if your heart were in your boots." Luigi grasped his hand feverishly. "But, *Carlo mio*," he exclaimed, "you here! Ahi, what have I done to fall into this trap? I have a *sfinimento di cuore*, in truth. Wine, for Heaven's sake!"

His eyes and face were working like some machine that had gone out of its mind, all in disorder. "Faith, yes, he will be sick," observed Carlo, amused at his old comrade's tremors. "Ascanio, bring some of the Count's wine and pour it down Luigi's throat. Be quick, too; the *poverino* will want an undertaker if you don't make haste."

The wine was brought and swallowed in great gulps by Luigi, still shaking from head to foot with his ague, and looking from one gendarme to the other, "out of the tail of his eye," as the Italians have it. "Is the *maestro* caught?" he whispered to Ascanio. "You have been crying like the sky in April: so he 's in the cage, too."

"Mind your own chestnuts, or they 'll get burned," said Carlo. "Feeling better now? Very well. What was your desperate hurry about?"

The brigand closed his eyes and seemed to be reflecting. Then he opened them wide, smiled with imbecile good nature on us all, and turned again to Carluccio, whose part in this dialogue, we felt, had better be left to him. "You 've grown a fine beard, *Carlo mio*," said the other at last—meaning in his jargon that our friend was playing the *birro*, or policeman—"but, it 's true? I am served?"

"Served you are," said Carlo, "and you 'll get l' *incanto*—penal servitude—too, if you don't spit it all out. These gentlemen are not *scarrafondi*—municipal guards;

they come from headquarters, from the Ministry of Justice. Ecco!"

"But, diamine, I was to go there with another paper; to the Prince Sorelli. Gesù mio, would it be a trap-pola? Read; here is the cursed vine-leaf!" saying which, he stooped and drew a letter from inside his leggings, with a fierce gesture handing it to me. There was no address on the soiled envelop.

"For Don Camillo Sorelli?" I said. "Not for the Minister Scanza?"

"Eh, no! the Saracen, no! For the Roman, without doubt. Livorno sent me once before. But now, it would be a trap? Is he the devil under the holy water?" alluding to a figure often seen in Italian churches, of a demon supporting the lustral vase and endeavoring to escape from his burden. This feeble-minded Luigi had hit upon the truth. Tiberio was intent on getting clear of the law; who could tell whether inside this dirty epistle the final arrangements might not be contained?

"He is a legion of devils," I answered, while these reflections passed through my brain. "However, you come promptly, just as you are wanted. We were all setting off to the Via Venti Settembre. First, Ascanio, open and read that communication you have been holding these ten minutes. What does it say?"

Carluccio glanced at it over the lad's shoulder, putting his arm round Ascanio's neck as he did so. "It is written in pencil," he said aloud; "sign of great hurry. Ah, ah! Livorno, would you? Signor, listen: I tell it you in good Italian; for it gives us commands in our jargon. 'Ascanio, yes, and Carluccio—eh, poor boys, you are both under pain of the sfranzumma—the razor'" —he made a sign of mutilation under the ear—"to join Santa Fiora at Le Pergole by Friday morning. Ascanio locks up the place here, and leaves the keys at —well, where he has left them on other occasions; and

so with good wishes, the Lord have you in his holy keeping!" What did I say, Ascanio? Treason, black as the devil's hide! We are all to lie on the same frying-pan!"

The younger lad uttered not a syllable.

"Friday morning?" I said to Carlo. "And to-day is Wednesday. You would have to start how soon? Where is this house, Le Pergole?"

He described the situation—in a hill-country toward Arpino. "We should start no later than this evening," he went on, "going by rail a part of the way, riding or walking the rest. We never go anywhere straight, you know," displaying his teeth in a frank smile.

"Except to Hades," I answered, smiling in turn. "We shall have to steal a march on your General. You and I and Ascanio will be there this night. But first to Don Camillo's!"

The three brigands cried out with one voice, "Would you thrust your head into the wolf's mouth, Signore?" They were appalled; Tiberio—not the Minister—was the wild beast they dreaded. "If he should be there we are lost," said Carluccio—"polished off—buried!"

"And Donna Costanza would be saved!" I told them. "Come, to the Prince."

I never saw less token of chivalry than on these faces when I mentioned Costanza's name. My young Apollo shrugged his shoulders indifferently; his companion stared at the ceiling; Ascanio seemed lost in his own thoughts. A strong feeling of sickness passed over me. For the moment I detested even Carluccio.

While we talked, the bell sounded again. A cautious reconnoitering by the page ended in his flinging the door wide open, and two more officers entered. They brought commands from the Minister; we were to attend him straightway. A closed carriage had been sent for us to the Palazzo Mocenni.

"Let us go," I said, after locking the secret drawers

from which we had unearthed Tiberio's manuscripts. But Ascanio begged an instant to change his dress. "If we are doomed to another meeting with Santa Fiora," he said, looking toward me, "I must appear in my proper costume. You have seen and admired it, Ser Inglese."

One of the gendarmes accompanied him to the room where he usually slept. It was not long before he came back, resplendent in the Lincoln green, with belt and tassels, bearing in his hand the hat with its peacock's plumes. There was a cry of admiration. "Pretty, is n't it?" he said, turning round on his heel that we might take in the full effect. "All the same, peacock's feathers are unlucky—almost as bad as your gray eyes, Signore!" with a glance at once merry and mocking toward the foreigner.

"Then take care you do as I bid you," was my reply. "Have you a cloak to cover up all those fripperies till they are wanted?"

"Eccolo," he said, bringing out one of those long black mantles, lined with green, which in England would give a man the air of a Gipsy, but are common in Rome, "and here is a cap for my curls," putting it on with a dandified air. "Now we can start. Carluccio, say a prayer to the Madonna del Carmine before we go." The others smiled. Carlo held up his hands in a devout attitude. "Madonna mia," he went on gravely, "if you will only spare Ascanio and me this time—well, you can throw in Luigi, too, it won't do us any harm—I promise you oil for the lamp every day I get a baiocco—yes, even if I have to—to borrow it, or—in short—there are ways. You will, then, as you can, in your bounty, deliver us from Livorno and the great devil, Madonna! Così sia."

With such equivocal petitions to Heaven we forsook the chambers in which we had passed so many hours.

Going down-stairs we made quite a small company. At the door one of our gendarmes mounted on the box, another came inside with us prisoners; and we drove along, passing at every corner groups of military, while the pavements resounded with the clank of their sabers. Rome was in a state of siege. But crowds still moved restlessly backward and forward, exhibiting the sullen, hangdog looks characteristic of these Montesi and Trasteverini when their blood is up. The city had put on a frown. I wished Camillo well out of his portfolio; but as the police did not exchange talk with us we were ignorant of what had befallen the Ministry.

In the Via Venti Settembre, Luigi and I dismounted. The guards went with us inside the palazzo; and I was once more seated with this shadow of a prince, whose trembling heart alone seemed to retain a spark of vitality. "I bring you a fresh bandit, Don Camillo," said I, looking sharply into his faded countenance. "He says you have seen him before; now he has a letter from—our common enemy."

"But I had one this morning by post," said Camillo; "what does this mean?" He tore the missive open, read, and folded it again methodically. "A duplicate, to make sure of the scheme," he said in his weary accents; "ragazzo—wait outside till you are wanted."

Luigi took himself off with a timid reverence. The Prince sat down. "I think these accumulated troubles will kill me," he went on, after a pause. "No time to be lost, therefore. Let me explain how things stand. The Chambers meet this afternoon; I cannot doubt there will be a vote of censure, and my father-in-law will resign. But until that is done, I am fastened here on the cross. No, let be what may"—interrupting himself—"to-morrow I will attempt Roccaforte. But there is a strange tangle in events. Sforza writes me, twice over, that he is certain Santa Fiora's whole band

will be collected on Friday at Le Pergole—a masseria down near Arpino. It seems that Santa Fiora is there now. We can take them by following Sforza's directions, on Friday, like rabbits in a warren."

"Will Tiberio be with them when the stroke falls, my Prince?"

He shook his head. "Much too wary. I know not even now the place he writes from. No, I am to send him word of the capture by a certain Candia—I remember the woman in old days at Roccaforte. Then we shall both have done our part. It was always understood—to this kind of bargain it is essential—that the informer keeps dark. There is plenty of evidence without his appearing at the trial."

"Of course you will have Candia followed?"

"What do you take me for? I am reckoning on that. You and I at the castle—this band of ruffians broken up, and Sforza tracked to his den—we shall, with God's blessing, see our way to recover Costanza. But all stealthily, else—"

A shudder passed as in the air. Too well I apprehended what his breaking off signified. It was the haunting horror of those days, which not for one moment, sleeping or waking, quitted my imagination, that had now seized upon him likewise.

I informed the Prince of what Tiberio had written to his page. The surrender was evidently to be complete and final of all who had served him hitherto. After various questions, Camillo said, "The evidence in these manuscripts"—they were lying before him as he spoke—"is probably sufficient; it may need corroboration. I hold to giving Santa Fiora a free pardon for that purpose. He and his band must, however, be captured first. Have you the will, Signor, to go with these two brigands and the lad, this day, to Le Pergole—the gendarmes accompanying you, and a detachment of mili-

tary joining as arranged by telegraph, from the garrison nearest to this farm-house? There may be some scuffling; though, with a little tact, you and the others could get Santa Fiora quietly into your hands. Then, to-morrow, you same three—we shall not want this Luigi—meet me outside Velletri at noon; the gendarmes will know exactly where—and we go up to Roccaforte. What say you?”

“Agreed, certainly, Don Camillo. But how can we reach Le Pergole to-day?”

“Easily. At every ten miles you shall have fresh horses. You drive a little round, for the sake of the smooth roads. By nightfall you will be there. This Carluccio, as you tell me, knows the building well. Ebbene; let him and the boy pretend that you are a foreigner they have entrapped. You are taken to Santa Fiora; I leave the rest to your skill and courage! And now, at Velletri to-morrow, a rivederci!”

We were soon bowling along the Appian Way—myself, Carlo, and the Robin Hood page, his finery concealed under the green-lined cloak—in a sort of diligence, which allowed us to stretch our limbs, and to take an occasional view of the landscape through its dusty canvas curtains. Two gendarmes sat on the box and two inside. We raced forward with a quickening sense of speed and of dangers to come, not unlike that, I dare say, which a young conscript feels as he is whirled and hustled into his first brush with the enemy. We talked in monosyllables. Our plan had been carefully drawn out; the perilous turns in it devolved on Carluccio and myself, who both wore concealed weapons; but once and again I saw the page lay his head on the rim of the carriage and sob vehemently. The thought of his master was agony; but perhaps not less did it tear this unhappy lad's conscience that he was now going to

betray him. Carluccio stroked the fair curls, whispered comfort in vain. I had no remedy for these pangs except to seem unaware of them, feeding my sight with all the charm of field and lake and sea-shore, as we flew through the land, summer about us on every side. We changed horses continually; the fresh pair of steeds cantered along; the villages came out to meet us and ran by; and as we skirted the Monti Lepini, and at last turned up toward Arpino, I sank into an uneasy slumber which was filled with visions of the whirling country.

Carluccio woke me with a start. "We get down here," he said; there was excitement in his voice. "Le Pergole is at half an hour's distance by walking."

When we left our dusty diligence, we found that a detachment of bersaglieri from the barracks at —— had been sent to meet us. They were skilfully posted in the woods, and, thanks to my young friend's knowledge of the country, these alert little soldiers could keep our trail to the walls and vines of Le Pergole. At a signal they were to invade the farm-house, having previously captured and silenced the scouts whom they could surprise without danger. Now we of the vanguard set out unattended. Ascanio threw off his cloak, and became transformed into a fascinating though pale-faced Rosalind; while I, according to my part, put on the air of a Milord Inglese, led between this page and his comrade the vignero into a snare.

It was an evening full of peace and suavity. The whole land breathed fragrance. As we went up the narrow lane which halted at Le Pergole, I could only think of that perfect idyl which certain familiar words called forth, and which was here an exquisite sensation, "The vines in flower yield their sweet smell." Le Pergole—as who should say, "The Trellises"—deserved its name. We encountered a peasant or two,

both before crossing into the vineyard and afterward—idle figures and not prepossessing faces—who greeted me civilly, making a marked difference between the stranger and his companions. But Ascanio's theatrical accoutrements did not seem to startle them. Carluccio, I was sure, had exchanged signs with these fair-spoken laboring men, though I had not seen him doing so.

The front gates were open; we passed into a capacious yard; my young man demanded of a fellow loitering there, "The Padrone a casa?"

"In the saloon above the wine-press," answered he, and turned away to other business.

"That is the best room for our purpose," whispered Carluccio. "Now, Signore, please understand as little Italian as possible. But when I say, 'Here is our prisoner,' you know what you have to do. In God's name, forward."

We ascended the stairs; Carlo gave a queer little knock at the door to which they led, and a high voice cried, "Avanti."

It was the human serpent, Santa Fiora—and alone. I knew him instantly. When he caught sight of Ascanio his face grew longer. "Before your time," he exclaimed. "Has—has the market gone well to-day?"

"Could n't go better," replied the boy; "we sold everything early, and, as you see, have got back in good time."

While he spoke neither the page nor Carluccio let go my hands, which they had taken in a kind of sport. Thus we came up, all three, close to Santa Fiora; upon which the elder of these lads began to move round gently, so as to stand between the captain and the window. My cue was to look embarrassed and sheepish, allowing a certain anxiety to peep out of my eyes; nor, in the situation, was it a hard part to play. The serpent never took his gaze off me.

"You are brave ragazzi," he said, smiling with his detestable teeth. "And so you have brought the honorable Signor to our house? What can we do to pleasure you, sir?"

Carluccio, edging round always, struck in, "The honorable Signor is a traveler. He was so charmed with the appearance of our vines that I told him he would like the juice of them better still; that, in short, our Padrone had some delicious golden wine up here, which he would decant with the greatest satisfaction."

"Surely I will," answered Santa Fiora; "there are some flasks in the cupboard behind me," turning round as if to get them.

"And you are my prisoner!" cried Carlo, in a joking voice.

"Eh—what the devil!" screamed Santa Fiora, struggling in the lad's grasp.

He screamed no more. I held his long arms pinioned; Carluccio had stuffed a handkerchief into his mouth, and Ascanio was quietly fastening a cord round his legs. In two minutes the thing was done. Only his rolling eyes were free; and the reptile—he looked it more than ever with his limbs fastened close to his body—turned them in blank amazement from one to the other of us. We laid him at length on the floor, trussed up like a fowl. Then Carlo, going to the window, flung it open, and whistled three times, loud and clear. He had no sooner done so than, from every corner of the vineyard, our bersaglieri sprang out. On their journey up they had bound several of the brigands, taken unawares from behind. They now seized the men who were lounging at their ease about the building, unarmed and off their guard; they had not the faintest suspicion that enemies were in the neighborhood. It was a splendid stroke, without bloodshed or broken heads. But I thought Santa Fiora would have

expired in a paroxysm that brought to his lips foam such as a rabid animal spits from him.

The saloon was full of bersaglieri. Their commanding officer—a very perfect gentleman—saluted me and said, “You will pardon my strictness, I am sure, but it is understood—is it not?—that till further orders you remain in my charge?”

I bowed. “A mere formality,” he continued; “there is another gentleman here in similar plight, the Marchese di Lucera. We have just released him from these gentry; but he will be our prisoner till we hear from Rome.”

“Lucera still unransomed?” I said, in great trouble. “I beg of you, sir, let the gag be taken from this villain’s mouth, so that he may answer my questions. In your presence—s’ intende—of course. Life and death may depend on it.”

The officer, keeping only a couple of men near him, gave directions as I asked. Santa Fiora sat up and glared around.

“Now, Carluccio,” I said, “explain to this creature what Don Camillo proposes—we have the papers with us—free pardon in return for full information. And ask him what has become of the lady.”

My dragoman had no small difficulty in persuading this vermin that now he was trapped he should not be given to the dogs. His face brightened on seeing the official document, which the captain, standing by, did not contradict. “What do you want to know?” he inquired, in a sulky undertone. “Who is this stranger that seems to have a taste for good wine and asks about a lady?”

“You answer me properly, brigand,” said Carluccio, with keen relish of the altered position in which he stood to his late chief. “Never mind who the Signor may be. Where is Donna Costanza?”

"All the devils in hell make fritters of me, if I know," said Santa Fiora. "Livorno took her with him days ago. The more fool I to let him."

"You lie, brigand," answered his former subject. "You durst as soon hinder Satan from carrying off your soul—which he will do yet—as throw yourself across the path of Livorno. He is a tiger, brigand; you are a rat."

"Remember, Santa Fiora," I said, interposing, "how he made you lay down on the flagstone in the columbarium five thousand lire more than you meant to shell out. Sodon't boast, but tell the truth—if you know how."

At these words he fell back on the floor. "Are you Old Nick himself?" he cried with a shiver, using an Italian idiom, and rolling away from me. "Don't come near, for the love of God! If you saw that business you know everything. But I swear to you—here, some one, give me a hand up"—and when he was seated with his back to the wall he went on, "strike me dead if I can tell you more than this. Livorno took the Princess; with four of our men, to an old ruin in the Isola of the Gran Sasso, days ago. He left here thirty thousand lire—you see I'm open with you as the crater of Vesuvius—in part payment for the girl; otherwise, you damned Carluccio, I would have torn her heart out of her body before he should have her. On Friday morning we were to get seventy thousand more, not a soldo abated, as Lucera's ransom; and that is why the whole band was to be here—this little scorpion of an Ascanio as well as the others; while the Count did as he liked with the damsel. What's going to happen now, choke me with the Sacrament if I can guess."

"But is there no way of saving Donna Costanza?" I cried. "Have n't you any means of trapping the villain before—before?"

Santa Fiora gloated over my agony. "Why, you callow fowl," he shrieked in his raven's voice, "she has been up there at least a week. If you know so much about me, you ought to be a little better acquainted with Livorno. He is a choice morsel for the devil's frying-pan. Eh, eh," he concluded in tones of ferocious enjoyment, "so you 've got to learn our good old saying yet, '*Donna baciata e mezzo mangiata.*' I'll take my oath on the Mass-book your Lady Costanza would be glad to go before the paroco with Livorno at this time of day. A proud, praying Santuccia, but not virgin and martyr—oh nò!" He screamed again with laughter, and the froth fell from his lips.

"Was Livorno coming here on Friday with the scudi?" asked Carluccio, seeing there was no more information to be dragged or torn from the wretch. "Who was to bring it?"

"Lucera had sent for his steward to visit him at this farm," answered the capobanda; "your Count did not mean, I take it, to put in an appearance. We held the Marchese tight; no fear of the steward giving us the slip while his master's throat lay convenient to our razors. If you want Livorno, hunt for him. And where 's Lucera now?" speaking with great insolence to the captain of bersaglieri.

"He is where no communication will be held with him until orders are given which do not depend on you," returned the officer, calmly. "To-night Le Pergole is under my command. In the morning you shall hear what remains to be executed before your pardon is made out. And now, Signor," inclining his head toward me, "I will find you comfortable quarters. My men will see to these. Have the goodness to follow me."

So we passed the night at Le Pergole, each haunted by his own dreams; and mine were sad ones.

CHAPTER XXV

THE THEBAN BROTHERS

THE morning broke in calm splendor; it was such a day as Heaven's great year brings forth. But our characters were already marked down for us; and leisurely—for Prince Camillo would not be meeting us until noon outside Velletri—we took our collation, and fell into knots of talkers, guarded always by the bersaglieri. Of the captive Marchese I had been vouchsafed not a glimpse. The brigands, comforted by a hint from Santa Fiora, which he was permitted to give them, of pardon under easy conditions, sank into the *pigrizia*, the idle mooning, or half-sleepy conversation, which is their pastime when off duty—that is to say, when neither plundering the defenseless nor fleeing before the carabinieri. They did not mention Livorno; he was a failure now, and as little mourned over as any dead monarch. Remarkably enough, they seemed to bear no malice toward the youths, Carluccio and the Rosalind-page, who had done them this bad turn. But I knew how long the Camorristi had kept their knives sharpened, to strike at last, in other instances; and I admired their habits of dissembling more than I should have trusted to their Christian meekness.

The capture had been effected with a secrecy beyond all praise. It was now determined by our polite officer that we should go forward in small parties; my two

companions and I in the diligence which had brought us; the brigands divided among the soldiers; and that a force should be left in and about Le Pergole to deal with Sforza, or with his messenger, on the Friday. I had considered whether Ascanio might be despatched in quest of him to the Island of the Gran Sasso; but on second thoughts I refrained from proposing this plan to the captain. There would be a risk of scaring the game by prematurely beating up the coverts; and, what was more serious, I could not reckon on the sensitive and heartbroken lad if he once came face to face with the master he had loved so passionately. One act of treason might be made to atone for another; the old affection might triumph, and Tiberio slip out of our hands after all. We must take him by stratagem, either at the farm-house, should he venture into it, or by following the witch Candia to her trysting-place with him.

As the midday Angelus rang from the churches and convents of Velletri, the Prince drove up to our diligence, stationed under giant chestnut-trees. He shook hands with me and said, almost smiling, though his eyes had kept a weary vigil, "The Ministry is down. A vote of censure has finished us; I retain the seals of office until my successor is appointed. The telegraph informed me late last night that you had caught Santa Fiora. Where is the holy man?"

At these words the captain of bersaglieri came forward. I fell into the background, and the Prince held a short colloquy with him. "Yes, that is what I desire," said Don Camillo, raising his voice, and approaching me once more. "These fellows," pointing to the brigands, "will now be held fast in the barracks here till I give fresh orders. But I shall want Santa Fiora and those two giovanotti of yours at Roccaforte as witnesses on your behalf and mine with my poor father."

His voice shook; he paused, as if unable to continue.

Then, recovering himself, "But it appears to me that they should follow after us at an interval, so as not to alarm the castle, and to give time for our peaceful entrance on the scene. How does it strike you, Signor?"

"As full of consideration for his Highness the Duke," was my answer. "In any event, he will be exposed this day to some violent and agitating disclosures. He is an aged man, alone with his great grief. I think you could not do more to spare him. But you will have soldiers posted round Roccaforte?"

"A few men well armed, in the disguise of cattle-dealers," he said. "We must excite as little suspicion as may be. You have divined my intentions toward the Duke," he went on, as we mounted into his carriage. "I feel that all manner of perils lie in wait for us; not the least is that of my father breaking down under so many conflicting emotions. But let us utter good words or none. We draw misfortune upon our heads by talking of it."

Neither of us, indeed, was eager for conversation as our carriage turned into the well-known paths, and trees, rocks, and houses came as if to greet our steps during the slow upward drive. To me, a stranger six months ago, it was all familiar now; and I strained my sight to catch a glimpse of the double platform cut out of the solid crags, on which the village, white in the afternoon sunshine, spread itself above us. Aye, there it was. I could count the houses, so distinct did they appear; and the frowning keep with its walls and bastions towered on high, the forest-trees seeming to make a frame for its lower parts, the mountains behind completing it as with a range of carved battlements. My companion, to whom these were memories of a lifetime, showed how deeply he was stirred by an added flush and by sighing frequently. I thought, but did not dare to whisper, that the scene to which we were momentarily

drawing nearer would try him fully as much as the old man that sat up there in his lonely grandeur, not knowing who was driving to his door.

Some distance from the gates the carriage drew up, and, giving Camillo an arm, I helped him to alight, our resolution being to make our way inside Roccaforte without warning to master or servants. There was no one visible as we passed through the medieval arch, black with storms and tempests, which displayed over our heads its sanguinary motto and the dagger pointing down. A silence which might have been undisturbed for centuries lay on the rude flags of the courtyard. The inner doors stood open; and we advanced without a word to the chief staircase, at the head of which, on one side, was the Hall of Mirrors—where I had been presented on my first coming to the Duke,—and on the other that Sala Grande, associated with more than one decisive incident in this tragedy.

We mounted the stairs—as he might have done, the fairy prince who came to wake the Sleeping Beauty—with steps at once passionate and uncertain. “Hark,” said Camillo, and his foot rested in suspense, “what sounds are those?”

I listened. They came from behind the closed doors of the Great Hall. Voices not subdued; the stamping of feet; and, as I thought, the clash of weapons. “There is a combat going on inside,” exclaimed the Prince. With a firm thrust he flung the door wide and rushed in, followed by me in an amazement which the words I now caught did not lessen.

“Ha, Gaetano,” cried a well-known voice, “a narrow escape for you that time. You parried my stroke villainously. ‘Out of practice,’ you say? I should think so.”

The sudden opening of the door made both combatants pause and look toward it with a wonder equal

to mine. At a glance I saw what was taking place. Gaetano, in his shirt-sleeves, his back to us, had been fencing with Hagedorn, also in undress, and had just received a smart touch that made him stagger. The light was in his eyes when he turned round. A few feet within the entrance I had stopped, on seeing that it was no real exchange of blows, but mere exercise; and Camillo stood alone in the center of the room, his hands raised as if to inquire the significance of all this. A second of time flashed by while we looked on one another. Then Gaetano, his features mantling to a purple fury, took one stride forward, and crying in a husky voice, "Camillo!" struck him across the temples with the flat of his rapier. The Prince fell senseless on the floor.

Another second had not passed before I was grappling with Gaetano and had wrested the weapon out of his hand. "Shame," I thundered at him, "shame on you! Do you receive a brother in this fashion? Here, Hagedorn, help me to hinder fratricide."

The German was not less excited than ourselves, but he understood the force of my outcries, and seized Gaetano by the wrist. "He is right, mio caro; control yourself—in God's name, for your father's soul, I entreat you—keep calm. Would you have these walls sprinkled a second time with a brother's blood? Never mind the weapon, I say. Gaetano, will you commit murder on your own hearthstone?"

Sullenly, as if not yet awakened from his rage, the younger brother gave in to these remonstrances. Hagedorn held him on one side, while I stood with the conquered rapier in my hand a little way off, determined to shield Camillo. With burning scorn my former friend glared at me. "It is you, Signor, again," he said between his teeth, "our evil demon. What blast from Hades brings you hither?"

I knelt down by the prostrate man, who seemed to be recovering, and lifted him from the floor. "Hagedorn, water, please," I said, without glancing toward Gaetano; "there is some on the table. Quick—he will faint once more."

The water was brought. I put it to his lips and bathed his forehead, where a crimson wale had begun to show the track of the sword. Happily, there was no wound. "I am not injured—nothing to speak of," murmured Camillo, rising with difficulty to his feet and tottering into a curule-chair beside the window. "Have a little patience, brother. I did not know you were at home."

"Therefore you come with this vile English traitor, who always stabs in the back," retorted Gaetano. "But, if I spare you, by the God that redeemed me, I will not spare him. Albaspina, your weapon! And you, sir," with ineffable contempt, throwing the words into my teeth, "take the button off the foil, and, at last, quit yourself like a man."

"Like a madman, I suppose you mean, Don Gaetano," said I. "We have something more serious on hand than to be mimicking the Corsican Brothers. Do you know what has become of Donna Costanza?"

"Do I know?" he repeated with strange hilarity. "The Englishman asks me do I know? Ah, Madre Santissima, but this is too much!"

He shook, and shook again, with laughter. I was beginning to fear that misfortune had unsettled his brain; but the appearance of Hagedorn, more tranquil than disturbed, was a puzzle to me. "Yes, I do ask what has become of Donna Costanza," I said angrily; "if you, her brother, can be indifferent to her fate, others are not."

With a terrible effort, to which swollen veins on the forehead and a thick utterance bore witness, he held himself in. "Take care—take care how you speak to

me," he said in a hoarse undertone, "or I will strangle you where you stand. How dare you name my sister in this house? You—but are you no less impudent than cowardly?"

Don Camillo, bathing his lips to moisten them, interposed in a feeble voice. "You wrong the man, Gaetano. There is some fearful misunderstanding. What is your charge against him?"

"Yes, let me hear the accusation," I said; "if it is proved, you will not need to kill me, Don Gaetano. I will spare you a task so ignominious."

"You may well say ignominious," he rejoined. "But surely you are a superb liar. What do I charge upon you, reptile? I charge you with having sold this ancient family to brigands. I charge you with being hand and glove with Santa Fiora, delivering his messages for him, leading me and mine into his toils, abducting my sister by means of his infernal gang. I charge you with the murder of Renzaccio; with blackmail, rape, and treason to one whom you fawned upon as your dearest friend when you were laying his hearth desolate. That is what I charge you with, you hound!"

Again Camillo would have interposed. I motioned him to keep silence. "These charges, my dear Gaetano," I said, as calmly as before, "are false; but I do not say you invented them. Of all that another time. For God's sake tell me what news you have—or is there any?—of the Princess."

"Shall I tell you," he cried, with blazing eyes, "to your eternal shame? I will. When you had her taken by Santa Fiora"—I made a gesture of dissent, which he swept, as it were, into the pit with his violent action—"I say, when you committed that crime, you reckoned without a brave and honest man, as keen of wit as yourself, and a thousand times better. You know what man I mean?"

"The Count, whom I brought to Roccaforte," I said, not blenching.

"Ah, precisely, the Count. Now let me strike you dumb with remorse for your treachery. You learned some days ago, I doubt not, that Costanza had been reft from your filthy hands. Perhaps you did not learn that the Count rescued her. I conclude from your visit this morning, in company with the fallen Minister, whom even New Italy has vomited out—I conclude that neither of you knows Costanza is safe beneath her father's roof, thanks to the man who will shortly call himself her husband and my brother."

I could have taken the Prince to my heart, as he flung me this unlooked-for, undreamed-of intelligence. Was Costanza safe? Was she in Roccaforte? "Thanks, thanks," I exclaimed, casting away the weapon I held. "Do as you will with me now; I care not. But you are sure, Gaetano? You have seen her? In this very house? Don Camillo, the worst is over. What is in your thoughts that you shake your head doubtfully?"

The younger man folded his arms, and looked over me with a wondering expression. Then he shrugged his shoulders and walked up to Hagedorn. "You understand these English better than we do," he said. "I take it the Signor was always crazy. Tell him yourself, please, that Costanza is here; that she is going to marry the Count. After which he had better leave the castle."

Hagedorn was beginning to speak, when Don Camillo raised his voice. "The Count is an acquaintance of mine, too," he said. "I had that privilege long before this gentleman. But where does he happen to be at present? Is he in the castle?"

"No," said the German, whose eye was toward the window, "he has gone out. Our knowledge of his movements is not extensive; but he returns—does

he not, Don Gaetano? — sometime to-morrow afternoon."

The reply was given with a slight hesitation, proceeding from the fact that Hagedorn seemed to be intent on what was inaudible to us, but visible to him, in the courtyard.

"And Costanza has given her consent to this marriage?" asked Camillo.

"That is all settled," replied his brother, sententiously.

There was a brief silence. "Who are those men that have just come in at the front?" said Hagedorn. "A regular troop of them. Are they soldiers? And that boy in green tunic and feathers? Come here, Gaetano. Look, we are invaded."

The young man was striding to where Hagedorn stood; but Camillo was there before him. "Thank Heaven," said the latter, fervently, "it is Santa Fiora at last!"

"It is Santa Fiora at last!" repeated his brother, in profound stupefaction.

"Now you will hear a true tale about me and the Count," I said, smiling; "we have brought these witnesses for your benefit."

Camillo, as I spoke, unfastened the casement nearest him, and made a signal that the soldiers should bring their prisoners into the Great Hall. A military tramp was heard on the stairs; with commotion the doors burst open; and there filed in irregularly some half-dozen captives, each held in leash by a carbineer. I had expected to see Santa Fiora with my youthful companions of these last days. But the sight of Sismondo di Lucera, his feathers drooping, his fine clothes the worse for wear, his bragging words spent to the last soldo, astonished me no less than it did Gaetano and the German.

Behind the Marquis followed, in a state of utter col-

lapse, as if anticipating execution that minute, my poor little Giovanni Finocchio. I ran up and shook him by the hand. "How come you here, Vanni?" I asked eagerly. He answered me with glazed eyes, in a voice resigned to fate—in *utrumque paratus*—"Ask somebody else, Signor; I don't know anything except that here I am. This time, as I warned you, Sant' Antonio would hear none of my prayers."

Lucera, crestfallen though he was, would have ventured on speech, when Camillo, very sternly, bade him hold his peace. "You are in the hands of justice, Marchese," said he; "I warn you how you commit yourself further. Don Gaetano," turning ceremoniously to his brother, who stood near him in an attitude of intense expectation, "I am still the King's Minister; these persons attend here by my orders, to answer any questions you may put to them. This individual, whom you see bravely attired in the uniform of a general, is Santa Fiora, who signs himself Count and has twice corresponded with you." Santa Fiora grinned in his ghastly fashion, and bent low on being named. The Prince went on, "These others are members of his company, or associated with his enterprises. I think you did not answer the letters he sent you. But *he* will now satisfy your inquiries to the full."

I could hear the statesman's heart beating like a hammer, as he sat down after this dignified and ironical address. He was flushed about the temples, and sipped mechanically from the beaker in front of him. But Gaetano seemed still more agitated. Holding on to his chair with one hand, he said abruptly to the capobanda, "What has the family of Roccaforte done to you, that you should attempt its destruction?"

The brigand made him a sweeping salute. "Pardon me, Signor Principe. What has it done? Why, nothing. I had no quarrel with your family." All his

teeth glistened; he flung back his snaky locks in preparation for another low bow. His interlocutor was visibly confounded.

"But at whose bidding, then, did you threaten, burn, and ravish? At this man's?" pointing to me vindictively. "Were you only his agent?"

It was now my turn to be saluted. "As I hope for grace and pardon," said Santa Fiora, "I never set eyes on that gentleman till yesterday: I could n't tell you so much as his name."

"But he knew more than your name, long ago," cried the Prince, exultantly; "he described you in every feature when we rode after you to the Monte Majella. How account for that?"

"Eh, because he is in league with Satan," retorted the other; "he knows what I paid down to Livorno when we were at four eyes in the pigeon-house. He knows everything."

"Yes, Santa Fiora," said I, interposing, "I saw you when you did not see me. But answer the Prince. Who set you on writing those letters, burning down the casino, and abducting Donna Costanza? Tell the truth and have no fear."

I could perceive that Lucera's yellow face had lengthened and grown terribly bilious, or even ashen-gray, when I came to the last article of my question. He looked imploringly at Don Camillo; but the Minister sipped his cold water and waited, like the rest of us, for the answer which was to burst in pieces a hellish plot. It came after an interval of the deepest silence.

"We must distinguish," Santa Fiora began pleasantly, with fingers extended. "I despatched the letters and set fire to the casino at Livorno's bidding—"

"Who is Livorno?" interrupted the young Prince, hanging on his next words.

"Livorno is the Count, as you style him—Tiberio

Sforza, as others call him—the Tisco Tosco, as we say among ourselves. In short, he is our manutengolo that has now been wanting to sell us to the Government—so this great Minister will assure you,” bowing to Camillo, “if we had not been too sharp for the go-between and sold him!”

Gaetano was a pitiable sight when these words struck home. “I cannot believe it,” he muttered, putting his hand to his forehead, which was burning hot. “Tell me, then,” he suddenly resumed, “who was it that planned my sister’s abduction?”

“Why, that is the point I was coming to, Sir Prince, con permesso. As for the plan, in general it was the Count’s plan; but the proposal was made to me by Eccellenza the Marchese di Lucera.”

“You lie, great hound!” yelled Sismondo. “I am innocent, I swear.”

“Don’t swear, Marchese,” threw in a boy’s piping clear voice, at which we all started. “You are certainly a liar; but why perjure yourself?” continued Ascanio. “I was present—you will remember this green uniform of mine—when you met Santa Fiora near Velletri by appointment. There it was agreed that he should carry off the lady. But another agreement there was of which you knew nothing—that he should carry off you as well.”

An irresistible laugh broke out from every one in the room, except Lucera, when this little narrative was finished.

“And who may you be, my pretty lad?” inquired Hagedorn, greatly interested in this gallant and sprightly apparition.

Ascanio sighed. “I was the Count’s page,” he answered, looking down modestly.

“My faith, you are hors de page now,” returned the philosopher, speaking in French.

"Oui, Mossù," said the lad, half in fun, but the tears stood in his eyes.

Gaetano was turning over carefully in his mind the allegations that showered upon him from such different quarters. He still resisted them.

"You say that Lucera proposed the abduction, but the Count—Livorno, or whatever his name may be—planned its execution. What were his views in all that?"

"His views, my Prince?" answered the brigand, for the first time hesitating a little. "I wish to God you would n't ask that question."

"But I do ask it," said Gaetano, doggedly; "you answer it."

"Well—if I must—*accidentaccio*, can't you understand?—his views were to get the lady in his power, and compel her to marry him. How compel? If you don't know that now, you will soon enough. Where is she?"

"Liar and villain!" cried the Prince, springing at him, but held back by the carbineers. "Son of damnation, it is false! My sister is as pure as the sun in heaven. Stainless, I tell you. If your Livorno laid a hand upon her, it would wither in that flame."

"Maybe—hope it is so. No offense meant," said the brigand, keeping a wary eye upon his questioner. "You asked what were his views, and I tell you those were his views. He had the lady taken from Le Pergole; since then I can inform you neither in what part of the mountains they are, nor yet when he will bring her home, if he ever does. Is that the end of my examination? For I'm pretty well fagged."

"One question more," said Gaetano, moistening his lips. "You say the Signor Inglese was not concerned in any of these things?"

"He was concerned in making me a prisoner yester-

day, I know that," growled Santa Fiora. "As for me and my band, we would n't have dealings with such an innocent. No, from the first letter you got down to this blessed moment, it was all Livorno; and I hope the devil may break him on the wheel, for if he does n't I see no use in the devil. Do you, gentlemen?" looking round on us.

"And, as regards Signor Ardente," said Finocchio, amid the general hilarity, "since he left Roccaforte, he has been with me, never out of my sight, at home or in the picture-galleries, all the time until two days ago, when he and this Carluccio went to the Signor Minister to have Livorno hunted down—which God grant may be finished speedily."

My poor Gaetano! He was broken. Coming up to me, he took my hand without a word. After a little while the tears gushed from his eyes; he stooped and would have put my hand to his lips, but I held him fast.

"How I have wronged you, Arden!" he murmured.

"It is over now," I whispered in his ear; "let us get these strangers out, and—and consult for your sister."

CHAPTER XXVI

COSTANZA

HE spoke to Camillo. The room was cleared, and we four—the two brothers, Hagedorn, and myself—were left to a discussion so painful that, after a few minutes, I felt constrained to say, “We must tell Donna Costanza at once what has happened. My dear Gaetano, call her down.”

“She is with my father,” he answered. “The old man’s mind has been shattered by these late confusions. But, Arden, you say well; we must be guided by her—and her alone. I will ask her to join us.”

“Stay a moment,” I said, as he was leaving the hall. “Where is that good Don Antonio, your chaplain and parish priest?”

“In his own house,” answered my friend, coming back to seize my hand again. “He is worn out with attending on my father, and has gone home to take a little rest. Do you think we ought to send for him?”

“I do. When he arrives, allow me a few minutes’ conversation with him in private, before he sees Donna Costanza. He is the only physician for such troubles as these. No one else can heal them if they are beyond his remedies. But he will not find it so—please God, he will not.”

The dear old man appeared before long, looking more

aged than ever, with much grief in his gentle gray eyes. He laid his pale fingers on mine.

"You wish to speak with me," he said, quivering as if the breath of this magnificent June day were too cold for him. "Come into the hall opposite."

When we were alone together I unfolded my thoughts briefly, with which he agreed, his face a mask as impenetrable as bronze or marble. I could not guess—it would have been an outrage to inquire—whether the Princess had taken him into her confidence. At the end he said in a steady monotone, "I will invite Donna Costanza to come with me into the chapel. There, at the foot of the altar, we will seek light and guidance from her Heavenly Bridegroom—Sponsus Virginum. Wait for me in the Great Hall with the Princes and Albaspina. I return as quickly as my errand, and these aged limbs, will allow. Courage, Signor; do not look so distressed. There is a God over all."

He mounted the stairs with slow and tottering feet. I went back to my place in the Sala Grande, and, happening to observe that the foil which I had cast from my hand was lying on the floor, I picked it up and laid it on the broad window-sill. In doing so, mechanically, I unfastened the button which was on it. My apprehensions came in a mighty flood. Never did I pass an interval so agonizing as this, while I dared not ask my companions what they knew, or how much they suspected. But Gaetano had affirmed that his sister's marriage with Sforza was a thing beyond discussion. Why should it be so? Motives of pride—gratitude—or one overwhelming motive of shame?

With straining ears we listened for the old man's coming. My heart sank as the time drew out and we waited there, speechless. Finally the door was pushed back with a feeble hand; I hurried to meet Don Antonio, caught him in my arms as he seemed to be col-

lapsing on the floor, and led him to the chair which Don Camillo had occupied during our late stormy scene. The priest covered his eyes with a hand which I could perceive was trembling, and while we gathered about him in consternation, did not speak or move. There was a portentous silence.

Making what seemed a supreme effort, at last Don Antonio spoke. His eyes were fixed on those of the younger Prince, and never left him.

"I have come down," he began in his bird-like treble, so clear and sweet, "from a great light—a great darkness—and I am dazzled. Be patient with me. Gaetano," he continued, "it was your command—not only your wish, but your insistence—that Donna Costanza should marry this Tuscan Count. What reason had you?"

"Reason, Don Antonio? Many, but one was enough. A girl of our house had, willingly or unwillingly, spent seven nights in the mountains, alone with the man. Did there need more reason than that? The honor of the Sorelli was my reason. True, he had, as I thought, rescued her, and deserved a fitting recompense. But, had that been all, I would have given him gold—not my sister."

"And you," said the priest, turning toward me a little, but not removing his eyes from Gaetano—"is it your opinion that this wedding should take place?"

"How can I answer?" was my impetuous cry. "Before all things, save her honor and good name. If she must marry Sforza, join their hands first, then drive a dagger through his heart."

"You speak my very thought," cried the raging Gaetano, who had now, as was patent to the eyes of all, given up his sister for lost. "Let her be his widow, since he has made her his leman."

He stamped on the floor in a whirlwind of fury.

But Don Antonio smiled, and his tears fell fast. "Ah, you men, you men!" he chided, with a heavenly rebuke in his accents, "how little you trust in God! how weak, you say, is woman! You believe no more in miracles. Harken to the latest, and go down on your knees. This child—this angel—has passed through the fire unscorched—the smell of it is not upon her garments. What do I say, unscorched? She is radiant with a glory as of the sun—virgin and martyr. Gaetano, will you faint? Hold him, Signor Arden; the joy is too much."

I held him, not less moved in my own sudden lightning of the heart than he was, and Camillo sobbed, while Hagedorn wiped his eyes repeatedly, murmuring I know not what in his German, but surely words of thankfulness.

"Now you must brace yourselves to hear this marvelous deliverance," resumed the priest, "after which Costanza shall spend an hour with us all. But remember how fearful has been her experience; do not allude to it when she is here. You must know, then, that as soon as she was captured in that cruel way—her eyes blinded in a sack, and strange arms about her—the Princess thought it was Lucera's doing. At the solitary house to which they took her first—"

"Le Pergole—yes, Don Antonio—I can inform you of all that chapter," I said; "that she asked again and again to see Lucera is true. But he was a prisoner; they had no communication together."

"So it was, indeed. She saw none but Candia and a young peasant who waited on her. Two nights after she was hurried off again by strangers. But now the young attendant—Carluccio, you tell me, was his name—warned her, as they rode up into the hills, first, that

her real captor was this Count; and second, that if she touched any food except that which he—Carluccio—should prepare, her fate was sealed.”

“Where is the young man, that I may thank and reward him?” asked Gaetano, eagerly.

“He was here with the others this morning; you shall see him presently,” answered his brother.

“The Princess now understood all. She thanked him, and made up her mind—praying for help to the Madonna—what she would do. Soon afterward, as dawn rose over the high woods up toward La Majella, her convoy was attacked, the banditti dispersed, and the Count appeared on the scene as her rescuer. But she had been forewarned. He soon showed what the rescue signified to him. Although she begged him to bring her home without losing a moment, he refused, pretending that the woods were full of brigands. On the same pretext he and his men led her away—Candia was a prisoner also—to the lonely mountain cottage, where she found herself a captive, with none but the old woman to wait upon her. In that fearful place she spent last week, from Sunday to Sunday.”

“Where was Sforza the whole time?” I asked.

“Sforza? You mean the Count. He left her some hours to herself. But when she would neither eat nor drink—the young peasant appeared no more—he threw himself at her feet, poured out his miserable love, which, he said, was consuming him, hinted that she was in his power—you can imagine the rest. But that which you never can imagine is the answer she made. ‘As God sees me,’ said Costanza, ‘I will touch no morsel under this roof, nor take a draught from your hands, neither will I close my eyes in sleep. Take me home living if you wish not to take me dead.’ Then she turned to prayer, and never spoke to him again.”

“But from Sunday to Sunday?” urged Gaetano.

"She lived; she did not die. Go on with your tale, for Heaven's sake."

"I tell you the simple truth. Her martyrdom followed," said the priest, shuddering. "The table was spread day and night before her. Wines, cates, delicacies were heaped among flowers to tempt her senses. The Count, infatuated, would not leave her in peace any moment, but raved and entreated and was mad in his wicked passion; to what purpose, since One stronger than he stood beside her in that prison? Going once or twice to the spring, and there wetting her lips—for so much they allowed—this pure saint knelt the rest of her time in contemplation, until her jailer withdrew, leaving to Candia the task of persuading her. That also failed. Nay, more wonderful still—you know what the people say of Candia?" directing his voice toward me.

"That she is a witch, a strega. It is true," said I.

"True or false," he resumed, "she was base enough to join in the plot to ruin Costanza. And now these two women sat alone, up in that solitary cottage, the mountains round them, day after day, the elder tempting the younger; while the Count prowled near them, waiting for his sweet morsel. But Costanza never spoke to him when he appeared. Some unseen power kept him at a distance, so that he dared not lay a hand upon her. He still hoped she might be overcome by drugs or in her sleep. And she slept not, but prayed hour after hour. At length her mind—I do not say wandered—"

There was a horrible pause, above which the wings of madness hovered.

"But she began to pour into Candia's ears the stories of the Saints; what things they had suffered, and especially those who, like herself, had given themselves to death rather than to shame. A whole day she talked

in this strain. As night came on, her voice grew silent. She fell into a trance—was caught up into Paradise—I know not how to describe the indescribable. To Candia it appeared that she was—dead.”

For what might follow now, we had no words. We hung on the lips of Don Antonio. His features had blanched under the vision of Costanza dead in the forlorn hovel.

“Dead she seemed to be; and the ancient woman laid her out on the rude couch, dressed as she was, and straightened her limbs, and tried to close her staring eyes, which would not be sealed up, but remained steady in a great horror, filling the room with their light. The demon-jailer came in, saw, and was appalled. His terrible rage who shall express? He would have struck Candia, but she took refuge behind the dead. Through the clenched teeth he endeavored to pour some powerful restorative; the liquor drenched his hands and fell on Costanza’s bosom. Then the hag—the witch, as you call her—rose up and drove him from the room.

“‘She is not dead, but in a rapture,’ said Candia now, feeling a sort of low and obscure movement of the pulse which, before, she had not noticed. Was it life? was it the ebbing of life? Whichever it might prove to be, the sibyl watched and waited, suffering no one else to approach—a vulture, you will say, keeping guard over a corpse. At all events, watch and wait she did, for thirty hours—”

“Good God!” murmured Don Gaetano, “what a miracle is this!”

“Thirty hours, I say,” went on the priest, “at the end of which time Costanza moved her eyelids, hitherto fixed as in death; her breath came; and, on seeing Candia, she smiled—you remember the sweetness of that smile, Albaspina, from the days when she was a

child?—and her first words were these, ‘I have been in heaven.’”

“Why not?” interposed Hagedorn. “It was her Father’s house to which she fled.”

“Why not, indeed?” was Don Antonio’s reply. “Caught up to Paradise, I do believe, she had seen there all those lovely semblances of saint and martyr, and knew them by their names—Agnes, Cecilia, Costanza, and that blessed company, with One more beautiful still, who promised that she should return home in peace and innocence. A banquet, too, was spread there, at which she tasted heavenly food and drink. She would willingly have stayed always; but the great portals opened to sounding music, and she descended, and was living once more, and her fears had passed away.”

“You mean that Sforza abandoned his design?” I exclaimed. “He were a fiend blacker than I know him to be, had he persisted.”

“He changed his plan assuredly. Leaving all now under Candia’s direction, he betook himself to the neighboring forest, and there waited until the Princess had strength enough to travel. She would not touch their viands; but a poor goatherd on the mountain brought milk which kept her alive the days that remained of her captivity. She had now subdued Nonna Candia to her will; it was agreed between them that Costanza should utter no syllable of what she had gone through, till the woman was here to confirm her wonderful story. You will not forget last Monday night, Don Gaetano, when the Count brought your sister home; understand now the reason why she has been silent. To-morrow Candia may be expected; she has gone upon a commission of her master’s, which will by that time be fulfilled. But perhaps you do not require any evidence from her now.”

He ended, and there was a long silence. We should be happy later on when our excitement, our gratitude, could find expression; these things were too much for us, coming after the events of the last days.

"Thanks be to God," said Gaetano, rousing himself at last. "Ask Costanza to come down."

When she appeared on the threshold, led by Don Antonio, we were amazed at the intense paleness of her cheek. In other things I saw no change. Looking round, she caught sight of me and smiled; but when Don Camillo came forward, saying, "Don't you know me, Costanza? I am your brother," she put her arms round his neck and kissed him. "Oh, I am so glad!" she exclaimed. "Welcome to Roccaforte, Camillo. How long I have wished for this day!"

Her younger brother approached more timidly. But she gave him her hand with a queenly assurance. "You will not ask me to marry the Tuscan Count," she said in her tranquil tones. "No, I see that chapter is closed. I forgive you, Gaetano; it was your pride and your affection for me that led you astray."

What more shall I write of the evening which followed? Shall I compare it to a sky lighted with stars, one planet alone shining ruddy and menacing in the wide ether? All our misunderstandings were at an end. The brothers went up, leaning on each other's arm, to their father's room, and what passed I never knew; but when after a long interval they mingled with us again in the Sala Grande, I felt the cloud which had rested between them almost a lifetime was rolled away. As we sat together in the stillness, which the drawn-out monotone of the cicale in the Roccaforte woods did but intensify—that strange, indescribable sound as of a shrill wave that never sleeps—I found myself telling these friends, through the clear-obscure, what I could not have spoken did they see my face the

while—how I first made acquaintance with Sforza, and the fatalities that came thronging upon my search for him in Rome. They heard me with a tender pity, not so much expressed in words as breathing like a sigh at the retrospect of things endured partly, as I could not choose but let them feel, for their sakes. I had my reward when Costanza rose and came to me where I was sitting, her hand ready to clasp mine.

“It was your great—great love,” she said with exquisite frankness, “your love for us, Signor caro, that made you this man’s victim. Gaetano, how shall we thank your Arden? We cannot thank him.”

For one little moment—oh, no more than it takes for the heavens to open and shut again—I thought, I dreamed, that our Gaetano looked across at me with a kind of wistfulness, and then at his sister. Had he seen the golden gates flash in the empyrean over us? But all he said was, “We cannot thank him, Costanza. Yet if he will take our love, it is ready, is it not?”

“Always,” she answered softly. “Our lives have run together in one stream; now we shall not be divided.”

We said no more. Soon after I was led to my own room, where I had slept on former visits. I paced it the livelong night, up and down. To take any sleep was impossible; my long-agitated spirits were wrought into a yeasty wakefulness; and I traversed these ancient stones repeatedly, which might, in other ages, have been soaked in blood, dry as they crackled under my feet now. The faded painting above me threw its gloom into my meditations. Its crimson fires burned more fiercely within me than on the ceiling; its Ajax in tarnished armor lifted his spear threateningly. “Yet Cassandra has escaped, Cassandra is free,” I muttered over and over again; “a mightier than Apollo has come to her deliverance.” Joy and grief were interfused in

a bitter-sweet cup, which, all that night through, I could not drain to the bottom. The star called Wormwood had fallen into it. And I thought, as morning broke over the hills, and their irregular battlements were touched with a waving golden line, of the ruddy Mars, looking down upon us last night from a heaven of peace.

We had still to meet and vanquish Tiberio Sforza.

CHAPTER XXVII

ILLA SUPREMA DIES

ANOTHER of those days such as hold festival in earth and sky, one arch of light bending to meet the waters, the June nightingales answering from hill to hollow in every green wood. The blithe hours began their dance in the sunshine early; old Roccaforte put on a wrinkled smile, its veins cheered somewhat from their sluggish dream of life by a warmth which struck genially to its stony heart. Yesterday's reconciliation threw over these wild places an enchantment for us who had taken part in it—a floating, gauzy brilliance that played in front of the advancing cloud. Even my gift, had I such indeed, of the evil glance was forgotten; I never saw man sprightlier than Gaetano, as he marshaled us—the company that had still to act under his direction—to our several stations. In his eyes the joy of battle gleamed. He sang, or hummed rather, between his teeth, an air from “Don Giovanni,” catching me by the hand whenever we met, stopping sometimes to look into the courtyard and mutter with a short, broken laugh, “That way—that way he will come! I have a welcome for him.”

His restless gaiety made me feel downhearted. “I wish Gaetano looked and spoke more like himself,” I said to Hagedorn, who was observing him with me. “These high spirits are unnatural. In our North

Country, when a man who is by temper serious—and such was the Prince always—breaks into sudden laughter, sings, and jests merrily, the people call him fay. Do you know the word? It signifies approaching death.”

“But you should not say so, my dear man,” returned Hagedorn, with some impatience, rebuking me. “Do bear in mind your own previous character—it is no secret now, therefore you will pardon my plain speaking—of cornix in ulmo. Change your note, I pray; cease to be the screech-owl of Roccaforte. There, there—you are not offended? I am an old fool, if you like, and ought to be ashamed of my superstitions.”

“They have been mine,” I said gloomily, “but let us, as you counsel, refrain from all except good words. Whose wheels are those?” I inquired, breaking off. “Surely not Tiberio’s? He could scarcely arrive from the neighborhood of Le Pergole so soon.”

“They are the wheels of Madame Tarquinia,” said my companion, going to the window. “What brings her at this time of day? Can she have heard of our young lady’s adventure?”

I struck my forehead. “Why, she should have come yesterday!” I cried. “In that hurly-burly I had forgotten the actress. After all, she was not wanted; and to-day she will keep Costanza out of the way until we have done with Sforza.”

She was fluttering into the hall like a great bird, her plumes glancing before her. “My dear Englishman,” she cried, “will you ever grant me a plenary indulgence for sins committed? Late, late! I know I am late—missed my cue, and have not spoken my patter, and where in Heaven’s name is the situation now? You look serious—it is not lost, I hope. But let me make confession of my sins—rather, I should say, of that idiotic Donna Camilla’s. No, I have not brought her in my carriage; I spare you that incommodo.”

She was clapping me on the shoulder in her motherly way, and questioning Hagedorn with her eyes. Apparently in his calm looks she found assurance. "Where is Costanza?" she asked. "First take that load off my heart."

I answered, "Costanza is at home, safe. Nothing but a miracle has happened, of which you will hear all by and by."

"Thank God and Our Lady," she cried, with an impetuous burst of tears. "Oh, I have dreamed of her every instant since I met you—and in such agonies! I must embrace her a hundred times—our angel! But yet, you will demand my explanation. Briefly, it is this. When I was on the point of setting out from Rome yesterday, it struck me that I would call in the Via Venti Settembre, and ask whether Don Camillo had left. I arrived. The doors were open, servants scurrying about; the place had an appearance as if after a siege, with its broken windows and general disorder. The Prince had gone several hours previously. But above, in her own room, lay the Princess, enacting all she knew of hysterics—which was not a trifle. On seeing me, she clutched me like a vise and began her piteous tale. Husband vanished—he would not say whither—the house invaded by soldiers sent from headquarters to take possession of everything—and her dear, good father—old Scanza, you know, a regular piece of fire-brick from Etna, hard as the devil!—excuse me for swearing—in immediate danger of arrest on account of those Bank frauds. So she raved, and what was poor Tarquinia to do? Leave her I could not. Reveal to her that Camillo was on the Damascus road—for it comes to that, does n't it? he repents and you saints forgive him—in the supreme crisis of their fortunes, I would not. So I told many lies—God will pardon me—and I cooled down her abominable hys-

terics, and stayed there all night, and said I would come again as soon as possible; and I have had no sleep, and I am sure my eyes have black rings round them. And now, friends, let me go up to Costanza."

She was away with the speed of an arrow. Hagedorn looked after the diva kindly.

"In my opinion," he said, returning to the window, "there 's more Christian feeling on the stage than off it. Admirable Tarquinia! If ever I married, it should be a woman with your big heart and brave hands. But, Ser Inglese, another carriage is entering at the gate. Whom have we here? Not your scoundrel, surely."

I joined him, and from our position behind the heavy mullioned traceries we saw a traveling-carriage drawn by a pair of long-tailed black steeds turn round in the courtyard and halt in front of the great staircase. A groom descended, undid the step, and gave his shoulder to a tall, dark figure which leaned heavily upon him. "Can you make out who it is?" I asked the German.

The tall figure stood up in the doorway, and the carriage drew back. Then I saw him distinctly. "Heavens, it is Cardinal Ligario," I exclaimed, in a tumult of feeling. "Did he get my manuscript? Has he read it?"

I went headlong down-stairs, almost into his arms.

"Adagio—steady—figlio mio," said the great man, holding me back; "moderate your transports. Who is this? I can hardly recognize any one in this dark passage."

"I am the English friend of Gaetano's who spoke to you at the Villa Borghese. Did your Eminence get my papers, sent after you to Vienna?"

He shook my hand warmly. "Sent and missent!" he exclaimed, beginning to mount the stairs. "I did get them, Signor, but not so soon as I ought. They

have brought me back to Rome, and out to Roccaforte. You shall hear in good time. But where is Gaetano? He left me on the frightful news of his sister's abduction. It is a good omen that I find you here. What has happened?"

I told him in snatches, while Hagedorn, after a flying salutation, went in search of the Prince. "It is well—it is very well," he repeated; "for once in this wicked world the child's innocence has saved her. But innocence clad in strength! Ah, we have need of that! Gaetano, my dear son, come to my heart." He embraced the young man, who sprang toward him joyously.

"You have fallen among us out of Paradise," said he, in that too high-pitched accent. "Signor Cardinale, my brother is up-stairs with the Duke. Will you let me present him?"

"Present Don Camillo! Why, he is my other son," answered Ligario, smiling, "the elder, and a prodigal! But I thought he would grow tired of their husks. And so Scanza is down"—looking at me with an intelligent expression—"and what comes next? The Republic? Well, well—the Church sees all things come and go—*Urbs cælestis, urbs æterna!* But how about this captain of brigands?"

"We expect him every minute," said Gaetano, eagerly.

"May he be caught in his own snare! It is a righteous wish, taught us in the Holy Writ itself. But a churchman should not be present *ad sanguinis effusionem*," he concluded, in his grave, jesting manner; "I will go up to the Duke."

Another interval, and Camillo joined us. We had by this completed our last preparations for receiving Tiberio. "He must fall by my hand," the younger

Sorelli had insisted. "None but I must have the honor"—he laughed frightfully—"of taking this wild boar. When that is done, Camillo, you shall hang up his tusks for a trophy, here, with nobler mementos." He looked round the Great Hall, which glittered, as the sun flashed in and out, with suits of armor, statues in flawless marble, and the antlers of ancient stags.

"Signori, to your posts!" cried Gaetano all at once. "I hear a horse galloping up the causeway. You know the watchword. On your lives do not appear till I give it."

Our situation was now as follows: At the end of the Great Hall farthest from the entrance was a raised dais, on which stood the high table at which the Duke and his most illustrious guests were wont to dine. During the winter months, as I described it to Laura in my first letters, the space thus marked off was protected by immense curtains of tapestry, reaching to the ground and making this a room in itself. On each side of the long table were doors, now held by picked carbineers, who had sent in before them our captive brigands, Carluccio, the page Ascanio, and Santa Fiora. In front of these, immediately behind the great curtains, which had been hung afresh that morning, Camillo, Hagedorn, and I were seated. The others stood about in various attitudes of expectation. Gaetano strode up and down in the vast open, with steps at once fitful and resolute. On the ears of all, as they waited in death-like stillness, broke the thundering gallop of a horse, ridden furiously along the paved ascent to the castle.

In my mind's eye, the form of Tiberio was visible as he dashed beneath the old portcullis. I could read the motto above his head when he passed through, "*Sangue lava sangue.*" Every man's heart, it seemed to me, must be throbbing like mine, with intermittent faintings. Outside we could hear the gallop arrested, the swelling

voice which called to Ser Angelo, with the steward's reply in lower tones. There was no mistaking the insolence of that triumph in which Sforza had ridden up to take possession of Roccaforte, of Costanza, and of the inheritance of the Sorelli. All, all was now his own, the proud accents told us.

He clanked up the stairs, ringing his spurs against them; flung open both doors with a single hand; strode up to Gaetano, where he paused in the center, and took the Prince in his arms. I wonder—and oh, had it but happened!—that Sorelli did not strike him dead.

"Congratulate me, brother mine," he cried, waving his sugar-loaf hat, which bore a long feather in it. "I bring you great news. Santa Fiora and all his band are taken! Not a man has got off. Captured, every one!"

He would have embraced the Prince again, who could hardly speak, but motioned him to a little distance.

"Who took them, Count?" he said with a dead-lift effort; "not you in person?"

"No, not in person. Yet I may say none other did it. Where is Costanza? I will tell you afterward. Hallo!" he broke off suddenly, "you have made some alteration in the room—put up those big curtains. What is the meaning of that?"

He was not in any way suspicious, though surprise showed itself in his voice.

"Preparations for your marriage, Count," said Gaetano, recovering a little. "The old place wants brightening for so grand a feast."

"Aye, does it?" laughed Tiberio. "Well, brother Prince—you remember I have royal blood in my veins, don't you? so I address you on equal terms—well, I am indifferent how soon the day dawns. Every hour is an age. If it were to-day I should be a willing bridegroom. This day, by God," he exulted, half to himself,

"Santa Fiora captured—the band rooted out; no fear of those devils any more."

"And so you will marry Costanza without delay?" said Gaetano, inquiringly.

"Aye, that will I. Nothing to hinder now," he answered, always jubilant.

"And you have royal blood in your veins; and I, as you know, shall never marry; and Camillo has no children. So, to sum up all, pass a few years, and you are lord of Roccaforte; you found a fresh dynasty within these walls."

"Oh, all in good time! How you run apace!" answered the other, deprecating with his hand such an accumulation of gifts. "Who knows but you will marry yet?"

As he stood by the window and the fiery sun shone over him, he was the image of villainy triumphant and irresistible.

Then Gaetano, drawing a step nearer, said, "Tiberio Sforza!"

"No!" gasped the other.

"Tiberio Sforza!" repeated the Prince.

"It is a damned lie of that Englishman's," cried the wretch, in a frenzy. But the words had not left his lips when the curtains were torn open, and a procession emerged from behind them. Slowly, for we had been told there was still something that Gaetano, and he alone, must undertake.

One glance showed him that the game was up. Tiberio, rooted to the spot by amazement, caught sight of Ascanio—my own eyes convinced me of that—in his woodland costume; and a terrible rush of blood to the face vanquished even his ghastly pallor.

"Ascanio with you," he shrieked in a voice from which all human expression had fled. "Ah, then, it is the end—the end."

A sound of many tramlings in the courtyard smote on his ears. Looking out, he saw it filling with soldiers. Then, with a stroke as of lightning, he seized the foil which I had left in the window yesterday, and as Gaetano plunged forward to lay hold of him, I beheld a gleam in the air, a cry followed it, the Prince fell to the ground. Tiberio, leaping over his body, made for the open door.

At the moment Candia appeared on the threshold, and we, rushing madly in pursuit, saw him fling her down the stairs, and himself turn before the on-coming soldiery up to the higher portion of the castle. Ascanio and I ran together; but fast as we hurried, the flying footsteps went in advance. They turned once or twice; the whole building seemed to echo with sound. Behind us came panting the armed men, who had only seen him as he fled from them; on the narrow ways there was confusion, jostling, incoherent speech. Ascanio and I followed still. A long gallery opened before us; at one end appeared Costanza, running out from her father's room; at the other Tiberio was beating in a door, that yielded suddenly, and he fell headlong. The soldiers drove us before them. We entered—it was the cell of the fratricide, with angel and demon struggling forever on the vaulted ceiling. Its long, narrow window stood open; at the door pressed in the carbineers; and Tiberio, his features black with a storm of passions, paused the space of a second on the parapet, looked round at us, looked down, and, raising his arms above his head, leaped head foremost into the ravine.

A cry of horror broke from our lips. I was nearest the fatal window, and I saw that it had no balcony outside, since the day when the great tempest carried all away. Of Tiberio not a trace, save where some broken branches, hanging yet in the air, had momentarily stayed his fall.

But Ascanio, rushing at me, doing his utmost to get by me, was crying aloud, "Oh, I have killed my dear master! I am his murderer! For God's sake, for pity's sake, let me go to him. I will go to him!" He tore at my hands in a mad expostulation. I held the lad firmly embraced; but it seemed that I must choke him with my fingers before he could be wrenched from the spot. Then Costanza, who had seen these things in a white horror, came to my relief. She bent down and kissed the boy's forehead.

"Come with me," she whispered; "you shall belong to me, Ascanio. Come."

He looked up into her eyes and was fastened there. "Oh, my master, my master!" he sobbed. "Why did you betray your own boy? And I betrayed you! Oh, let me die, Signorina—it is so sweet to die! He is out there; his limbs shattered. Let me go, I say. His last words—you heard them—they were for me!"

He went off into a swoon, while Costanza endeavored to lift him from the floor; but her strength was too feeble after the sufferings of those days.

"I will take him," I said; "leave Ascanio to me. You will be wanted down-stairs."

Then came beating on me out of heaven the awful tempest, and I remembered Gaetano lying prone as Sforza leaped over him. "No, no, not down-stairs," I stammered; "go back to your father—back, I entreat of you. Not down-stairs!"

"Something has happened," she said, making the sign of the Cross, and she stopped and was silent. "Now we will go down together," she resumed in the quiet voice which signified heroic resolution. "Bring the child where he can be attended."

The soldiers, when this horrible catastrophe had put an end to their pursuit, did not linger in the upper galleries of the castle. As we turned and were going

down, Cardinal Ligario passed out from the Duke's apartment, and came toward us. Our silence hushed any question he might have thought of asking. He took Costanza's arm and followed me as I led the way with the insensible Ascanio for my burden. An equal stillness prevailed in the room below. What had thrown all these into a stupor so absolute?

I went in by the wide-open doors, and, seeing what I saw, turned, with a countenance that told the tale before I could utter it. I besought the Princess to come no farther. She had already passed me.

"It is Gaetano," she said.

He was lying on his back, Camillo bending over him, the rest motionless. I had expected to see a pool of blood where he fell. There were but a few drops on his cambric shirt, open and disclosing the wound which his own foil had inflicted, driven by Tiberio's rage. I laid Ascanio on a couch; but no one minded the boy. Costanza knelt at her brother's side, holding the hand which would nevermore take hers. I think he knew she was there. His eyes seemed to express that knowledge. But the next moment they closed forever. He was gone out of our reach without a word or a groan.

Another form appeared within the doorway. "God be gracious to us!" cried Hagedorn, "it is the Duke," and he hastened to support the old man, who was tottering slowly forward, his feet entangled in the long dressing-gown that he wore, amazement looking out of his dim, red eyes, which had lately been shedding many tears. The Cardinal, intent on whispering, in broken accents, what comfort he could at a moment so dreadful to Costanza, rose up and took his old friend's arm, helping him thus until they arrived at the tragic center to which all faces were drawn. The Duke paused like a man that has been walking in his sleep; and a striking and sorrowful group it was on which his gaze rested.

But he seemed not to comprehend. In a husky tone he expostulated with Camillo. "Children, have you quarreled so soon?" we heard him say. No one could answer; and he went on, in the same absent voice, "Was not a single act of fratricide enough in this house, that you add a second? Up-stairs I heard the great wind raging, and men pursuing each other. I thought the dark and white angels of Conraddino had issued forth from their dismal chamber to cross their swords here. But you must not quarrel, children—not wash away their blood in yours. It is time our device was altered—six hundred years is a long time."

He was sunk into the abyss of his melancholy thoughts, and saw nothing beyond them. Camillo, deeply affected, held Gaetano in his arms, waiting for Dr. Mirtillo, who could but assure us of what we knew already, that we must abandon hope. The Princess, leaving that dear charge, went steadily up to her father and smiled—to my astonished eyes it was visible—smiled and spoke in his ear soothingly.

"I will take him up to Donna Anastagia," she said, "and come back. Gaetano, forgive me if I leave you; it is only for a moment, Gaetano."

There was infinite tenderness in her gesture as she led the old man away.

CHAPTER XXVIII

MYRTLE, RUE, AND CYPRESS

THE Castle was now a scene of varied lamentations and of help sought that could not avail. In my charge I kept the page, Ascanio, watching over him as he fell from one paroxysm of grief into another, and calling to my aid the gentle Don Antonio when I perceived the stripling would not cast away his resolution of self-murder. He begged hard that I would take him into the ravine, where Tiberio had fallen; but until certain maimed and terrible rites were accomplished, I did not dare.

The military below, apprised by their comrades of what had happened in the Conradin chamber, filed round through the woods, yet in their lustiest green, and, not without difficulty, clambered down to the gulley which yawned at an enormous depth under the fatal window. Let us throw a winding-sheet over what they found there. With such things neither language nor imagination should deal. In the rich, neglected mold they dug a trench far enough down to hide what was left of Tiberio Sforza from human observation. As he died by his own act, with a record which to the last line was crimson, not even Don Antonio could venture to suggest that the Church owed him her funeral obsequies. He was buried like a dog, without prayer, incense, or holy water; nothing marked the

spot save the trampling of the soldiers' feet, as they stamped the earth down over him. Had he dashed a red stain upon the old walls as he descended through the air? They were black with age, overgrown with lichen, and they kept this secret, as they did many another, to themselves.

Yet, after nightfall, when Mars flung his purple ray out of heaven, the lad and I went in silence down to the heart of the ravine; we stood by the newly made grave, and—I know not in what language of the spirit, but as well as we were able—strove to send our thoughts, our very selves, in pursuit of the phantom, now so strange to us, who had shaped both our lives to sad, abiding issues. Without speaking, we became friends as we stooped to drink these waters of Lethe.

"I will follow you now," said Ascanio to me that night, "you and the Princess. Do not be afraid for me; I shall do myself no harm now."

"You and I, *giovane mio*, and our friend Carluccio, will spend our lives together, I hope," was the answer I gave, grasping his cold fingers. "We shall be happy yet, please God."

"And the Princess?" he asked, with a flicker of his old playfulness, "shall we stay with her?"

"I cannot tell, Ascanio. If she says, 'Stay,' we stay. And if," I concluded sighing, "she bids us go, we must do her pleasure. Here or there we belong to Donna Costanza."

But how would she dispose of us? It was no time to inquire. Gaetano lay dead in the Great Hall, looking more heroic and beautiful than I had ever seen him. His brother was stricken dumb with sorrow. Tarquinia said to me, after considering his features attentively, "You must be prepared for another funeral when our dear Gaetano is gone to his long home. No, I do not think the old Duke will leave us yet. He has never

understood anything that happened since Costanza was taken away. I mean Don Camillo. There is death in his eyes."

"Shall we send for his wife?" I asked her.

"I have sent; here is the reply she makes," answered the actress, producing a letter. "She cannot leave her father under the cloud that has burst upon him. Let Camillo return to Rome when his brother is buried. So much for her. I prophesy that he never will leave Roccaforte alive."

"Now it is you—not I—that scatters ill-omens," I said, with the troubled smile that seems to haunt great calamities, "but I fear you prophesy truly."

We took Gaetano down to the mausoleum which his family had erected in the village cemetery since disposing of their palace in Rome; and, amid a mighty concourse and lamentations on every side, we laid our beloved within the marble monument—not far from Renzaccio's lowly grave—Cardinal Ligario reciting the last Christian words, and I in my heart whispering to him, "Ave atque vale, frater!" I never could have a friend so dear again while this world lasted. "Ave atque vale!"

In a few weeks Tarquinia's forebodings were fulfilled. Camillo had gone down to his brother in the shades. Before that event happened my own destiny took another turn. One morning I received a letter from Laura Winwood, telling me that my father had sent for her and held a long conversation, of which it was her duty to inform me without delay. My brother had given him a deal of trouble; and now, feeling that a new world was coming in, with which he sympathized as little as he understood it, the dear man asked me whether I would stay away from home until he died of solitude. If I chose to return he would put the estate into my hands, allow me to manage it in my own way,

and look on, *laudator temporis acti*—as one who had finished his part and quitted the stage. To this what could I answer?

It was clear, as soon as I read Laura's epistle, that only one answer would satisfy my father or me. I did not hesitate; but I lingered, with a vain hope of some miracle, that I knew was never destined to take place. I had not undergone such tragedies at Roccaforte in a dream which would suddenly break off into golden lights and a happiness more than human. But Camillo was in his grave, and the Cardinal had gone back to Rome, and yesterday afternoon I sought Costanza, where, in the Great Hall, her father's favorite resting-place, she sat not many steps away from him.

I had told her the contents of Laura's letter, to which she listened kindly. When she saw me, I dare say the color on my cheek warned her of a rising emotion. She pointed to a chair beside her; but I stood, in a half-questioning mood with myself, a little way off, and at last found a voice.

"Donna Costanza," I began with an effort, "your sense of duty would teach me mine, if I truly needed it. But you will like it better when I say, as is indeed the case, that I never did hesitate after my father had written to me. I am going to England."

"That is right," she answered. "Go, and may you be happy. We are each of us striving to do God's will—I in my way, you in yours. The children—old Candia's Lupo and Bice—will be my children henceforth; you always desired it, did you not? And you take that bright Ascanio—rare in his gift of loving—and simple Carluccio—"

"And I leave you, Signorina; and how will my heart not break?"

She looked at me steadily. Then her glance stole toward the aged figure, propped up in his curule chair

amid cushions, dignified as a Roman senator. Again, she leaned her cheek upon her hand—Juliet's way—and spoke, as much to her own thoughts as to mine.

"I am only a girl, and not deep read or much traveled," she said, "and I lost my mother early. So that I seem never to have had any mother, except the Madonna. Bear with me, then, if I say anything which is not maidenly; for I have had no one to teach me."

"Oh, Donna Costanza!" I murmured.

"Yes, for I am going to say something bold. Until you came, Signor Arden, I never asked myself what love meant; I did not think of it. I was willing to marry Sismondo when the time arrived; but, left to myself, I should have chosen some life in a convent—to be a Poor Clare, or a Carmelite nun. From you, and your talk with Gaetano, I learned that the world I lived in was a sort of beautiful dream. I heard more about the troubles of men and women than I had ever imagined; and yet, you remember, I was doing all I could down there for them," pointing to Roccaforte. "But a more wonderful thing happened."

"What was that?" I asked, trembling in the excess of my great joy.

"I learned the meaning of love," she answered, smiling at me.

"But, Costanza, you do not mean? It is impossible you should mean—"

I could go no further. And still she smiled.

"It is impossible," she answered. "You know it; and I know it. We clasp hands across a stream which we cannot pass. You are of a race, a religion—how many things make it impossible, dear Arden? This makes it impossible," she said, glancing yet again toward the slumbering figure. "We are as ghosts in this ancient house—the last of the Sorelli; with us it will crumble on the mountain side. But do not grieve for me; as

neither do I for you. You and I have passed, I sometimes think, as I sit here alone, into a world, an atmosphere—I know not how to call it—but to something beyond earthly marriage—into a light where all these differences fade away. You will go home; and, were I perhaps as other girls, I should tell you to make Laura your wife, to forget Costanza, to let this be all as a dream. I do not tell you that. I say to you rather, hope in the good God who has taught us both what love means, and what is its great price. And now, Arden, go from me. But yet, in that other world, we shall be always meeting.”

I held her hand one moment, no more; and I left her, alone with her great grief, alone with her noble thoughts—the old man slumbering like a child, who was henceforth to be her inheritance.

In an hour we see the last of Roccaforte. My companions and I begin our journey toward England this night.

And in my ear the lovely Sophoclean lines are murmuring, which I trust bear a promise for her and for me, in that other world where we shall surely meet. Listen to their music:

Χαῖρ', ὦ Αἴηνον πέδον ἀμφιάλον,
καί μ' ἐνπλοῖα πέμψον ἀμέμπτως,
ἐνθ' ἡ μεγάλη Μοῖρα κομίζει,
γνώμη τε φίλων, χῶ πανδαμάτωρ
δαίμων, ὃς ταῦτ' ἐπέκρανευ.

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